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Nancy Lambert, a story of Lancashire life [by M.A.M].

M A. M, Nancy Lambert

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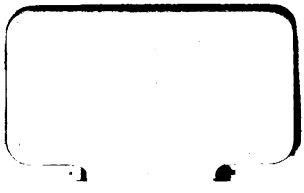

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NANCY LAMBERT.

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"Old Mrs. Royle fell in love with the child from the moment she first saw her."—*Page* 117.

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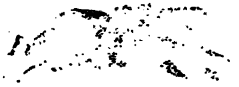

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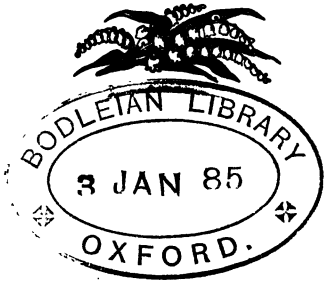

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NANCY LAMBERT.

CHAPTER I.

A SAD PICTURE.

IN a dark and miserable back kitchen stood a wretched looking woman making pretence "to wash up," as she called her ineffectual efforts to wipe a few cracked plates and dishes with a greasy dishcloth. Her dress consisted of bed-gown and torn apron, unwashed and unmended, a wincey petticoat, still older and more dirty,—not to mention boots out at toe and down at heel. Her iron-grey locks straggled over a grimy face, or hung in disorder behind a much worn bonnet, perched gipsy fashion on her head.

From time to time she paused in her work, as if looking out for an expected arrival or listening for a footstep. Presently the latch of the outer

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door was raised, and the door itself opened somewhat slowly; whereupon the woman called hastily to the new comer,—

"Alice Ann! Alice Ann! is't thee come in at last? I've been waitin' of thee this hour and more. Hand me o'er thy money, wilt ta? Thee father 'll be shouting for his supper afore 'tis nigh ready, and we'll have t' street raised, as it were last neet, wi' his cursing and swearing and carrying on."

So speaking she came forward from the dirty inner kitchen, or scullery, just described, and held out her hand impatiently for the money she had just demanded of her daughter. She dropt her hand as quickly, however, on perceiving a large draper's parcel and paper bag in the hand of Alice.

"Now then," she screamed at the highest pitch of her rough voice, "what on earth have yo' been up to, Alice Ann? and where hast gotten all that rubbitch from? If thou's been spending a single ha'penny o' thy wages, I'll put both thee and thy parcel a top o' th' fire."

And she actually stepped up to the girl as if prepared to carry her threat into execution, for she was in a flaming passion. And one of

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Nancy Lambert's "passions" were no joke, as her neighbours could testify.

With a careless laugh on her bold but good-tempered face, Alice stepped back towards the threshold, prepared to defend her goods and her person, or to "run for it," as the case might be. She was not one whit afraid of her vixenish slatternly mother, but being by nature a peace-loving girl, she was wont to endeavour, in the many differences which arose between them, to gain her end quietly if possible. If not,—well: she was a fair match for her mother, provided the matter in dispute could *not* be settled peaceably; and was besides well aware of the power of her weekly earnings in the miserable household economy of her wretched home, and therefore of the fact that, beyond a certain point, even her mother dared not thwart her.

"Now, now mother," she remonstrated, "don't you kick up a shindy. It weren't likely as I should be goin' on the excursion in the old clothes I've worn since last year's 'out.' The girls were talking about one thing and another as they've got: I'll not go shabbier than them you may depend. And there's Jim, too, he'd be fine, and vexed if I weren't dressed up a bit.

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May be he'd not be for walking out wi' me any more."

"I'll ha nowt to do wi' none o' yer Jos or Jims," interrupted her mother. "What's a wench like you want wi' walking out, indeed?"

"That's none o' your business," returned the girl, angrily; for "Jim" was a sore subject between mother and daughter: the mother fearing to lose the girl's earnings if she married, and the girl determined to have a sweetheart, like her companions.

For a few moments it appeared as if the quarrel between them would certainly *not* be peaceably settled, but might afford to the neighbours that sadly too often repeated spectacle "of raising the street," which the rough women of Norbury looked upon rather as a diversion than otherwise.

But Mrs. Lambert thought better of it. Supper-time was at hand. The remnant of money left after last Saturday night's carouse was spent. Credit, she had none. If she provided a supper for her husband to-night, may be she could coax him to give her a large share of his wages. If she provided no supper, she well knew that she would get no money, and very probably would "feel the weight of his hand," too; therefore

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whatever it cost her, Alice Ann must be spoken fair, in the hope that the draper's parcel had not absorbed the whole of her week's wages, and that she might be cajoled into giving her mother wherewithal to make provision for this evening's meal at least.

"Well, well," continued Mrs. Lambert, calming down somewhat, "'tis no use bothering; and whatever I'm to do, when yer father may be home any minnit, raging and tearing down the place because I've got no supper for him, *I* don't know. There's Ralph and Dan, too, been playing 'em three days this week, and never come anigh me yet with a penny of their money. Mrs. Watkins says she seen 'em go across t' common wi' Bill Shute and his pigeons, so 'tis not likely they'll have much left out o' their wage, and me a waitin of you, Alice Ann, and now you've gone and spent it all o' yer own back, and I'll be bound you haven't got a penny left."

Here her passion subsided as quickly as it had risen, and sitting down on one of the few dirty chairs the comfortless kitchen contained, she threw her apron over her head and sobbed like a child.

Seeing that the storm was over for this time,

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Alice stepped inside again quite coolly, laid down her parcel, untied it, looked over her purchases, tried the gaudy artificial flower and feather against her hair,—all the while furtively watched by her mother in the interval of her sobs. When she had finished her inspection, she turned round and threw some silver into her mother's lap.

"There," she cried, "I'm not so bad as you would make me out, mother. Mr. Smart said I might leave five shillings on this till next week end. He knows I'll not wrong him, bad as I am; so take it, and make the best of it, for father 'll be here directly, and I wouldn't be in *your* shoes if supper's not ready. Besides, I'm hungry mysel'. I'd sooner do a day's work in the smoothing shop than choose a gown. What between one colour and another, and this stuff or that, and then the nicest things being the dearest, I'm fair tired out with having to settle which of 'em all I'd buy, so make haste, mother. When I've put these things out o' th' way o' th' children, I'll set the table ready, if you'll promise to get summat that's worth eating."

In mortal dread of seeing her husband's figure looming at the end of the long street, Nancy

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Lambert hurried to the nearest butcher's shop (a most unsavoury little den, where remnants of unwholesome meat lay on a dirty counter, and a few scraggy joints hung here and there on rusty hooks against the wall). She bought a couple of pounds of flabby, pink-looking beef-steak, which she wrapped in her apron. Then hastily added to her purchases a loaf of bread, some half-melted butter, and a bunch of onions.

"I reckon I'd better not stay for the beer," she thought to herself, looking in at the door of the "Bottle and Glass" as she sped homewards: "Nelly can fetch that while I do the steak."

"Father not been in?" she asked, breathlessly, of her daughter.

"No, mother: you'll be all right this time. Bought some steak, have you? Well, that's right: I like summat as has a substance when one is hungered."

Then the uninviting-looking meat was quickly put into the fryingpan on a huge fire, to be fried or scorched, as the case might be, and mother and daughter, friends once more, sat waiting the return of the husband and father, on whose behalf such hurried preparation had been made.

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While he delays we will explain the condition and character of the unruly and somewhat ill-matched inmates of the comfortless home.

Poverty or discomfort should have been utterly unknown here, for William Lambert earned good wages. He was employed in the extensive chemical works of the Messrs. Bowstead, Norbury, and being a clever workman was entrusted with processes requiring skill and care. Such work is well paid. Three shining golden coins, bearing the impress of the Queen of this goodly realm, sometimes even a larger sum, fell to William's share on "reckoning days" each week. There were besides two growing-up lads, each earning several shillings weekly; and the daughter Alice Ann, whose weekly earnings, dependent on her industry in the "smoothing shop" (as the glass polishing process is called by the girl workers), ranged from fifteen shillings to a pound.

True, the family was large. There were still two little lads who professed to attend the National School, but played truant instead on every bright summer's day when bird's nesting could be indulged in; and every frosty winter one when ice would "bear" for sliding.

Last of all came a girl,—so small and delicate

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a creature, one marvelled at her relationship to the big brothers and sister: a strange reproduction probably of some long passed away ancestress, —a child with earnest grey eyes, fringed with long black lashes, fine silky hair, tiny feet and hands. Her brothers and sister mocked at her delicate beauty. "The little lady" they called her, jeeringly, when she shrank from their rough play and loud jokes, or turned away from the coarse food so uninvitingly served. Her school-mistress would tell a different tale, however, and was wont to be loud in her praise of little Nellie Lambert. No scholar in all the school more regular than Nellie. "Hail, rain, or snow," the child was daily in her place, and took to her books sufficiently to satisfy the most exacting teacher. On Sundays, too, she was always to be found in her class. Between herself and her Sunday teacher existed the tender attachment often, thank God, to be found between Sunday school teacher and scholar; amounting to an almost passionate devotion on little Nellie's part, and a very earnest desire on that of the clergy-man's daughter, to whose class Nellie belonged, that the little one placed in the midst of so godless a home might early be brought to Jesus.

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"What on earth can make Nell so set on going botherin' to that Sunday school passes *my* comprehension," her mother would declare, as Sunday after Sunday came round, and Nellie hastened away breakfastless often, save for a piece of dry bread or drink of cold tea: no early rising on Sunday morning in William Lambert's house.

Then her father would lay his hand gently on the child's head (he was always gentle with Nellie): "Don't you go for to hinder the little wench, mother," he would say with a sigh. "I mind the time when *my* mother made every one of her children, little and big, go to Sunday school. If our Nellie grows up like her she'll do well."

"The child may go her own gate, Will," his wife would answer, sulkily: "I care nowt about it one way or t'other."

And so the graceless household went on its God-forgetting way week after week, year after year, as if there were no such thing as a judgment day, or the life of a world to come. Every one, except little Nellie, living the life of heathens in this Christian country of ours.

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CHAPTER II.

A MUCH DREADED ARRIVAL.

"MOTHER," said little Nellie, creeping gently in at the door, "Father's coming up street now."

Mrs. Lambert and Alice sprang up and peered out anxiously. In what state would he come home? that was the question.

"Is he coming by his sel', Nellie?" she called, cautiously, to the child.

"Yes, Mother," nodded Nellie, turning her head indoors for a moment. Being her father's favourite, she dreaded no penalty for "watching him," such as might have fallen on the heads of the others. "Yes, mother: he's got nobody with him."

So far, so good. William Lambert was not "drunk and incapable" this time, and *some* of his money might reach home with him. But

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there was still another stage to be dreaded. If he had taken enough drink to make him "fractious," and if his wife accosted him with angry reproaches, as was her foolish habit on such occasions, then good-bye to peace or comfort, even in the smallest degree, for his family. The children, big and little, got out of the way as quickly as possible, and the husband and wife—fought it out. This course of proceeding ending in injuries, greater or less; sometimes even in a summons for Monday's police court. A horrible picture indeed, but one by no means uncommon in a town like Norbury.

As he drew near to his home on this particular evening, however, their fears were allayed. He had had "a drop," it was true, but merely enough to raise his spirits from the habitual depression of the drinker.

"Well, lass," he called to his wife: "supper ready?"

"Aye," she answered, greatly relieved to find him in a better mood than she had ventured to hope, "I reckon 'tis,—ready and waiting. Come thy ways in, Will."

So they gathered round the table—father, mother, and Alice that is,—and fell to on the

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leathery beef-steak, with all the goodness burnt out of it. No inquiry was made for the absent sons. As they grew up each member of this family did what was right in his or her eyes as to hours of work, recreation, or meals; and the little ones knew they must keep out of the way until father had done.

Refreshed by what he called a good supper, washed down by a plentiful supply of beer, which Mrs. Lambert caused Nellie to fetch from the public-house close by, William Lambert propounded a plan for the enjoyment of himself, his wife, and daughter on the coming Sabbath day.

"Dick Platt and me has joined at Lewis's waggonette, Nancy," he exclaimed, "and we're all going to Dinglewood on Sunday. We'll have a rare good day in the country away from all this smoke and smell. I'll let thee see what kind of a life I were used to when I were a lad. Many's the time I'm tempted to wish mysel' back at those days again. We earned a less wage, 'tis true; but we lived better lives, I believe."

"Well, lad, I'll not be against having a look at the country yo're so fond on; though I thinks mysel' it would be dree and dreary living there

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all the year round. As to a better life, don't begin o' botherin' thy head about that. 'A short life and a merry one,' say I, and let us hope God won't be too strict in His dealins with us at the last. We've trouble and bother eno' i' this world, and might hope to have none in kingdom come, I'm thinkin'."

Will looked grave for a moment.

"That was not my mother's teaching, Nancy; but there, 'tis no use botherin', as thou says: it 'll all come right in the end, some how or other, I reckon. Come, Nell," he went on, "bring thy little stool and sit aside of me, and tell me what thou thinks about a ride to Dinglewood o' Sunday, eh! my little wench?"

The deep grey eyes looked searchingly up into her father's face, and the colour rose in the delicate cheek as she made answer.

"I'd like right well to go with you, father, but not to miss Sunday school. I'll bide at home this time."

"That'll never do, Nell," he said, lifting her up on his knee. "These white cheeks will get some colour put into 'em at Dinglewood; and then think of the flowers, Nell!—cowslips, and all sorts; and father 'll show thee how to make the

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cowslip balls he's told thee of many a time. May be I'll go to church with thee, too, at Dinglewood afternoon service, Nell, if it 'll make thy mind easy; and thee knows how thou's allers at thy father to get him to go to church along o' thee."

It was a sore temptation cunningly laid for the little soldier of the cross, but she was faithful to her Lord.

"Oh, father, if only you would go to church with me *here!*" she pleaded, her eyes filling with tears: "but I *couldn't* go a riding on Sunday. Teacher said, 'Keep holy the Sabbath day,' and I daren't go, dad; indeed I daren't."

William Lambert's good angel surely pleaded with him then,—or rather God's Holy Spirit moved on the face of the man's sin-darkened heart. Will he resist His holy influence? Alas, yes! The softening gleam passed quickly from his face. Conscience accused him, and he would none of it.

"If thou doesn't care enough for thy dad to go with him to Dinglewood, wench, thou canst take thysel' off to bed," and he pushed her angrily from his knee. "The Bible tells thee summat about pleasing thy parents, doesn't it?

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but there, get off with thee; m' 'appen it'll be long enough afore I'll ask thee to go out again."

Stifling her sobs, the little one crept with breaking heart to the bed she shared with her sister, and there lay fretting till she cried herself to sleep, and so forgot her trouble for *that* night.

Meanwhile, gloom fell on those remaining below. Conscience told Will Lambert that he had been both unkind and unjust to his best loved child. Not so ignorant as his wife, owing to the early training of a pious mother, who died while he was still a lad, he knew full well the sinfulness of the life he was leading; but careless habits and drink having deadened his conscience, remorse troubled him now only by fits and starts, and its warning voice was stifled each time more easily than the last. Both Mrs. Lambert and Alice were considerably astonished to witness the harsh manner in which her father treated Nelly, about a matter to them so very insignificant. Presently he rose, and with a few muttered words to the effect that he had to see Dick Platt again about the arrangements for to-morrow, he slouched out of the house.

Should he "give back word to Dick?"

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He loved his little Nellie very dearly, and his heart bled when he thought of his severity towards the fragile child, dearer to him than anything else in this world—yet, he couldn't do it. *How* Dick and the others would laugh at his newly found scruples! He who had prided himself on being "no saint," the life of their circle, and a good comrade always,—free with his money—and, truth to tell, with his fists as well, if his temper were roused. So he effected a compromise with conscience. He would let Nell go alone, offering no further hindrance to her resolution to "keep holy the Sabbath Day." He would even show that he bore her no malice by bringing her home a fine posy from Dinglewood. And next Sunday week he really would go to church with her, just to satisfy the child for once in a way.

Will, gone out, Nancy and her daughter made some effort to "side up," as they called it.

"Mother!" called Alice from the back kitchen, "there's a deal o' pieces o' bread throwin' about. What will I do with 'em? There's t' big basket full."

"Take 'em across to Biddy Doran, Alice, she'll give thee some coppers for 'em. They'll do to feed them pigs the Irish creature sets such store

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by. Tell her most on em's buttered too, so she mun give thee a good few pence this time. And call at the Vaults o'er coming back, and bring us a drop o' gin. What with the hurry o' supper and the fear o' being put about wi' thy father, I'm tired out and ready to drop. It'll do us no harm to have something hot afore we goes to bed."

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CHAPTER III.

"A SABBATH PROFANED"—AND A NARROW ESCAPE.

SUNDAY morning dawned bright and warm as a summer's day should be. Nellie, with one regretful look at her still sleeping father and mother—and with a wistful longing which *would* arise in her heart, notwithstanding all efforts at repression, for a breath of pure country air and a sight of cowslips and green grass—hastened away to morning Sunday School.

Long afterwards her teacher remembered the expression that Sunday morning on the pale little face of Nellie Lambert. An expression, weary, yet glad—as of some struggle successfully gone through, and of peace following.

But Nellie had not been the first to leave the house on this particular Sunday morning. Very soon after dawn a low whistle might have been heard outside the window of the lads' bedroom.

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Bill Shute had come according to appointment to rouse them. Their destination was Dene Park, and their object in making so unusually early an expedition, the snaring of certain game, four-footed and feathered, considered by right-thinking minds to be the property of the noble owner of the Dene Estate, and certainly in no sense that of Bill Shute and his companions.

It was not long past noonday when the waggonette with Dick Platt and the elder members of his family drew up at Will Lambert's door to take in the rest of the party. Clothes had been released from pawn, and the unusual spectacle presented to the neighbourhood of Nancy Lambert, "dressed up," as they called it, in tumbled finery, none the better in condition for long detention at the pawnshop.

Jim had been laughed out of his newly-formed resolve "never to miss his Sunday class," as well as out of a promise given to his class teacher that he would accompany him to church on Sunday evening. He stood among the noisy party—some of them merry with drink already—prepared to keep Alice company on the expedition; and feeling his broken promises lying like a heavy weight on a mind ill

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at ease. The lad was young yet; many good influences had surrounded him of late. Conscience *would* have her say; and over and over again the solemn words he had heard last Sunday read by Mr. Howard's clear voice, kept ringing in his ears: "*Remember* that thou keep holy the Sabbath Day."

However, it was too late to mind them now. No doubt it was wrong to go; but then he had been "over-persuaded." It was only the old story repeated: a foolish woman's misused influence.

Alice wouldn't *let* him turn back; the others would make game of him. Although he lingered to the last in miserable indecision before setting his foot on the step of the conveyance, it needed but a few rallying words from the company, with a look from his sweetheart, to make him lay aside all serious thought, and become even more noisy than the rest.

The heat and dust were great during the first part of the drive, but they beguiled the tedium of the road by singing, at the top of their voices, the uncouth, and often far from refined ballads common to that part of the country. All had melodious voices in greater or less degree, as is

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the case with Lancashire folk; and Jim, with some of the younger ones, as well as Will Lambert, could not help remembering certain hymns, with chorus of a very opposite character indeed from those in which they were now indulging—hymns in which the same musical voices had taken part at class or meeting; but they only sang their unholy songs the louder by way of drowning reproachful thoughts. Many a glance of sorrowing wonder from foot-passengers on the way to church or school pursued the godless party on their road.

They urged the driver to greater speed, regardless of heat, heavy vehicle and weary animals; and presently left the dusty main road for peaceful country lanes, green with all the freshness of early summer, which led to the lovely village of Dinglewood. Involuntarily they were quieted down as they drove through them. What a contrast they were to the town so lately left behind!

The elders of the party could well recollect such a peaceful country life as this; before the rapid rise of Norbury manufactures and "works" of all kinds had caused the crowding together of large masses of work-people.

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Will Lambert's mother had lived in just such a cottage as the one they were passing now. A cottage where the tiny windows were well nigh covered with roses; and "travellers' glory" hung in a huge clematis like mass, over the rude trellis of the porch. Where there was just such another little garden too; the straight path down it paved with smooth white and grey stones, in a lozenge pattern, from door to wicket-gate; and the box-bound borders on each side filled with sweet-william, carnations, and mignonette; tall dahlia and hollyhock towering queen-like above. A thick quickset hedge, full of a tangled mass of sweet-briar, rose and honeysuckle, guarding the small domain, and keeping all cool and secluded from the road.

His eyes filled with tears even, for while they admired the cozy little dwelling, the door opened, and out came an old country woman in simple Sunday garb, ready for "afternoon's church," the Bible and Prayer Book in her hand, wrapped in a clean white handkerchief. Just such another as my mother would have been, thought Will. As she turned to lock her door she bestowed a grave glance of astonished disapprobation on the Sunday excursionists.

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Will almost thought she shook her venerable head in sign of disapproval. It seemed to him like a message from his dead and gone mother.

The bell was just "dropping" as the crowded waggonette clattered past the church and into the village. The advent of these pleasure parties was becoming sadly too common in Dinglewood thought the Rector, who dreaded the effect of "evil communications" on his simple village folk. Many agreed with him; but some of the young people already began to think that it "roused them up a bit" to see people from strange places; and if they went a walking instead of to church now and again on a Sunday afternoon, where was the harm? By which it may be perceived that the good Rector's fears were not entirely unfounded. "In this free country," added some of the more adventurous, "may we not do as we choose? Are we to be for ever in the parson's leading-strings?"

"To do as we choose" pourtrays a very inviting state of things to sinful human nature, were it not for the reverse side of the picture: "Know thou that for all these things God shall bring thee into judgment." So the villagers, most

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of them at least, went to church; worshipped and praised the Giver of all Good, and heard His Word. The Sunday pleasure-seekers got out of their carriages at the door of the village inn, already becoming used to such visitors. The panting horses, defrauded of *their* day of rest, were led to the stables; and the party set out, to "look round about a bit."

Dinglewood was a beautiful old-world country village. It had an ancient church, the graveyard full of moss-grown grave stones adorned with quaint mottoes; some simple and touching, some bordering on the ludicrous.

Near the village, in a small park, full of magnificent trees, stood the mansion of one of the oldest families the county boasted, one that for generations past had served "God and the King" right well.

In the village were curious old cottages—the black and white still to be found in Lancashire and Cheshire. Even the gardens looked "old" with their wealth of sweet-smelling old-fashioned flowers; their prim box-bordered walks, and yew hedges and trees cut out into shapes of impossible bird and beast.

Dinglewood could almost call itself a seaside

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place, situated as it was on the estuary of a famous river.

It had its tide, and its little shore (rather muddy if the truth must be told), from whence could be seen trading vessels passing up and down with every flow of tide. Thus was it rendered doubly attractive to the poor smoke-dried inhabitants of Norbury; who called the river breezes "sea air," enjoying them accordingly; and loved to wander over the narrow strip of muddy sand in search of cockle shells and sea weed.

Down to the shore wandered the pleasure-seekers this Sabbath afternoon; led by Will Lambert, whose conscience reproached him more than ever in the quiet of the church-going country place.

"We'll go to the sea-side," said he, till church looses: "there's no folk to be seen yet."

Before long, however, they grew weary of it, for the tide was out, and the sand both wet and muddy; so they came back into the village again. Up and down it they went, peering into the pretty gardens and tidy houses, exchanging a word or two with the half-shy country folk: Will longing more than ever for the life he lived

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in "Mother's" day; Nancy beginning to tire, and wondering when Will would be done straying up and down, and would propose an adjournment to the "Plough and Horses," for something to drink this hot day. The rest of the party had wandered off in various directions in search of amusement to their mind, so Will and Nancy were left alone. Presently they reached the cottage whence they noticed the old woman setting forth to church that afternoon. She was seated now on a chair outside her door, with her spectacles on, and her Bible on her lap; reading a verse now and again, then stopping to think over and enjoy it—and the sweet summer scents and sounds as well. Her husband meanwhile moved about among the "blooms," as he called his flowers, bending over them lovingly in admiration.

Seeing Will and Nancy stand longingly at her gate, and noticing Nancy's weary fretful face, she closed her Bible, and, like the true Christian gentlewoman that she was, came forward to offer them a 'rest for a bit.' Will, thankfully accepting, opened the gate and walked in, Nancy following.

"Thank you kindly, Missis," spoke Will, as Nancy was installed in a comfortable big arm

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chair by the chimney corner of the exquisitely clean old-fashioned kitchen, with its white-washed walls and large rafters passing across the low ceiling, its lozenged-paned little window through which the sunlight streamed, shining on lovely flowers set in curious earthenware pots of long forgotten date, falling in chequered ever-changing pattern on white-washed wall and stone floor, making a brass candlestick glitter like burnished gold, or a dark oaken press stand out in strong relief.

"I don't know," continued Will, "as I've been inside o' such a place as this since my mother died. Hers was just such a cottage. She was a good woman, was mother; but she's been dead and gone to Heaven this many a year, and father too."

The old woman looked at him over her spectacles. "A good woman his mother was," he says (so ran her thoughts). "Well! well! I reckon he's forgot her teaching. But 'tis a strange place, that Norbury. I've heard tell o' a deal o' wicked folk livin' in it. Then out loud: "She was a countrywoman, like me?"

"Ay," he answered, "we were all born and bred i' th' country, a goodish bit the other side

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o' Norbury, where I've come from to-day. I were telling Nancy I'd show her what country folk and country life were like." "And now Nancy," he continued, "you can picture my mother's cottage by this, and th' gardin' and a', and my mother herself,—if you'll allow me to say so ma'am, for I could'nt help thinkin' how you, *favoured'* * her as we saw you a settin' out for church, when we come by."

The good woman looked at him with considerable interest now. Long years back she had had a son—an only son—and "God took him," just as he entered into manhood. Suppose he too had gone off to work at Norbury, and had been tempted out of the right path, as she could see very plainly was the case with this man,—would she not have been glad for some one to speak a kind word, hoping to win him back to God and the better days of his youth.

So she spoke. "I reckon you're not as particular i' Norbury as we quiet country folk, as likes our Sundays and our church. You'll have minded all that, may be, in your mother's time, if she were such a body as I take her to have been."

* 'Favoured,'—well known by Lancashire people as expressing a 'likeness.'

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Will started. Nancy coloured. If it had been at home in Norbury, the neighbours would have expected Nancy Lambert to go into one of her 'tantrums.' "Not a word would *she* hear of settin' to rights from gentle or simple," was her boast.

But it was not possible to be angry with the kind old woman whose hospitality they were enjoying; besides there was a calm superiority about her which made Nancy feel abashed for once in her graceless life.

Will could not but acknowledge that "Mother would have fretted, sure enough, if she'd been here this afternoon."

"Then may be you'll forgive an old woman who has one only son in Heaven this many a year, if she says what your own mother would say, could she speak to you. Don't be havin' aught to do with Sunday 'outs,' and such like. They give you no true pleasure i' this life, and the thoughts of 'em 'll plague you sore when you lie a-dying."

"Ay, Missis, there's my little Nell, as wouldn't come wi' me to-day, she holds with you in what you say; but as for me and my missis here, we've gone a different gate so long 'tis not easy to be changing at our time o' life. And Nancy reckons God won't be too hard upon us at last."

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"Eh, man, man!" said the old woman earnestly: "God is *never* hard. Has n't He said, 'He willeth not the death of a sinner?' 'Tis *we* poor sinful folks that are 'hard;' breaking His good laws, and goin' against His holy will, till we bring ruin upon our own selves at last. The Lord is very merciful and full of compassion; but if we will have nought to do with His love and mercy in *this* life, how *can* we look for it in the world to come? If He is merciful, we're bound to remember that He is just too; and He is like to keep His own Word: 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that *forget* God.'"

Then, seeing that the wife's patience was sufficiently tried, and that she made as if she would leave, the good woman changed the subject, to ask for Nellie, the little one who had remained at home; and hearing of her perfections from the father, ever eager to praise his darling, they all grew quite friendly. And the old man gathered a fine country posy for Nellie, which would make her colour come and go when she saw it, and would fill her with happy thoughts of the bright country as long as the flowers lasted—which would not be long in the stifling atmosphere of Norbury. The kindly old couple made Will

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promise moreover to bring the little one some Saturday before summer passed away, to spend a long day with them: promising the heartiest welcome in the world.

By this time the sun was sinking behind the apple trees in the cottage orchard, reminding Lambert and his wife that their party would deem them lost in good earnest did they not speedily put in an appearance at the inn; so with many hearty thanks to their host and hostess, they bid them good bye, and hastened away.

Said Will, "I'll never go of a Sunday's out like this again, Nancy."

Said Nancy, "Well, I dunno, Will: folks as leads a quiet life, like them two, may easy be good. 'Tis different for us as bides i' all the noise and worry o' Norbury, as 'ud vex a saint."

"Who makes the noise and worry, Nancy?" rejoined he.

They found the rest of the party wondering, as they had anticipated, at their prolonged absence. Indeed they were greeted with some amount of merriment concerning the unusual fondness manifested for each other's society. The joking was not carried to any great extent, however; both Will and his wife being well known

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to be 'touchy:' but to-day they bore it with unwonted equanimity,—Will especially, being considerably softened by his chat with good Mrs. Royle.

Then followed 'tea,' as it was called; though that alone would have been considered sadly too poor and weak a beverage by even the women of the party, without the addition of some spirit or other. This partaken of freely, as well as much beer which had been consumed by way of cooling drink during the hot afternoon, made them more rough and noisy than ever during the homeward drive in the summer twilight, through the charming lanes, whose quiet peacefulness they put to shame by their riotous glee.

Coming back to the high road they encountered other vehicles returning from similar expeditions, with passengers much in the same condition as themselves. Chaffing, shouting, stirring each other up to race, to the distress of worn-out heavily laden steeds, they drew near to Norbury again.

A very steep incline, the scene of more than one accident, led to the town, which was built partly at its foot, partly up the sides of an opposite hill equally steep. A small brook

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beautiful once, but now scarce more than an open sewer used to carry away waste liquor from chemical works, divided the hills, and was spanned by a bridge somewhat narrow, considering the immense traffic of the roads it connected. A vehicle, containing friends of Lambert's, which had been striving for the palm in a contest of speed, drew up on nearing this incline. The driver of it being tolerably sober and well aware of the danger he ran, shouted to the other to abate his speed, or he would surely be upset. He being a silly youth, well plied with drink, unaccustomed to drive, and only sent out that afternoon because his master was short of hands for Sunday work, resented the interference, and urged his horses to still greater speed.

Providentially for the safety of the party, Will Lambert was seated on the box, and though he had drunk pretty freely was, owing to his quiet afternoon, more sober than the rest. When a lad he had worked as stable boy, then as ploughman, and many a restive colt had he tamed in his day, before prospect of higher wages and good cheer brought him to Norbury in search of work. He was fully alive to the danger they were in, and aware besides that it might be now too late

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to avert it. The horses, lashed forward by their inexperienced driver, with their stable and a good feed in view, had set off at a great pace down the hill. To stop them would be impossible. He seized the reins from the nerveless hands of the terrified youth; told the shrieking women to be quiet if they did not wish to drive straight to destruction; calling to them that if they sat still he would do his best to keep the horses on their legs, and so to guide them safely over the bridge, when the opposite hill, could they reach it, would end the danger.

But *would* they ever reach it safely? That was the question. Their horses were tired, the carriage over laden, the hill steep. It was a fearful risk: passers-by stood horror-stricken as they watched the swaying vehicle in its headlong course. Will had an iron grip, in which he steadily held the poor animals, now quite as terrified as those they carried along at such terrific speed. Yet they were saved from death. God had mercy on the sinful beings who had that day forgotten Him and broken His laws. After a few minutes of awful suspense, the horses galloping across the bridge came, all trembling and foam besprinkled, to a standstill on the

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opposite hill. Every one except Will, who was proud of his feat, sprang from the conveyance. "Thank God," said Will, audibly, and one or two more joined in. The rest laughed, as best they could, over the bygone danger and the "close shave."

Arrived at the stables, the master on hearing of Will's courage, and a little afraid perhaps lest reports as to an inexperienced driver might injure the Sunday custom he found so profitable, proposed to treat all the party.

Will refused, and set off to go quietly home, where he went to rest in good time, his mind full of thoughts more serious then he had permitted himself for years.

If he had not been able to guide those horses safely down hill!—He began to think he really would turn over a new leaf some day.

In the early morning hours, when the desecrated Sabbath had gone to give in its account of misspent hours to God, Nancy Lambert and her daughter stumbled home. Drunk!

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CHAPTER IV.

"IF SINNERS ENTICE THEE, CONSENT THOU NOT."

DURING the selfsame Sunday wherein Lambert and his wife sought amusement and relaxation from weekly toil at Dinglewood, their sons Ralph and Dan were pursuing a similar end after their own peculiar fashion.

Roused from sleep by Bill Shute, the lads, so hard to waken when work was in question, sprang instantly out of bed; and in "stocking feet," lest haply they might rouse their parents, crept downstairs, gently opened the house door, and made off in company with their undesirable companion. They were in the highest of high spirits; it was their first experience of an adventure of the kind they contemplated. Bill Shute was a thoroughly experienced guide and counsellor on such an occasion, and had promised moreover to "put them up to a thing or two." So what could they

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expect but a considerable amount of enjoyment from a day spent in such company!

As to its being the Sabbath Day,—God's day of rest, which He commands to be kept holy,—that mattered little to the thoughtless Lambert boys, and not at all to idle Bill Shute; who was an habitual Sabbath-breaker, and ever ready to persuade others to a like practice.

Oh, if every Christian man and woman were as anxious to lead fellow-creatures to Christ, their Lord and King, as are the servants of the prince of darkness to draw others into his toils, what a different place might this world of ours be!

Rattling his money in his pocket, Bill walked gaily along.

"Why, Bill!" remarked Ralph Lambert, the elder of the two lads, "you might have a mine o' gold in your pocket wi' all that jingling."

"So I have, lad," replied Bill, too much elated with success to be reticent. "So I have: while you've been sleepin', I've been a filling my pockets. I've had uncommon luck at Reece's all night; so I'll treat you both to a rare good breakfast, by way of keepin' your pluck up."

This partaken of, the youths, joined by several kindred spirits, set off without further loss of

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time on their lawless expedition,—noisily at first, but growing quiet as they reached the confines of Dene Park.

The pastime of poaching was becoming an extremely hazardous one. "The Earl" was said to be determined to put it down as far as his estate was concerned; and to check the lawless depredations of roughs congregating in ever increasing numbers in Norbury.

The spice of danger only increased their foolhardiness; yet the majority of these youths could not be classed as "regular poachers." As to the game they snared, its value was comparatively small; they could have bought as good any day in Norbury Market; indeed such luxuries were by no means rare at the table of the Norbury artizan,—immense wages enabling him to "feed like a lord," as he boasted. So it was simply in defiance of law and order that this and many similar expeditions were set on foot among the ill-conducted young men of the large town.

It was considered "rare sport," and a mark of pluck,—this taking of what was not their own by forcible means, and carrying it home as a trophy of skill in "over-running the keepers;" or of courage, in having beaten a faithful servant

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guarding his master's property, "within an inch of his life." A somewhat melancholy example of the honesty and valour of young England, as represented by the rising generation of Norbury!

As to the imprisonment, which was sometimes the melancholy sequel of such attemps, it was ignored by the younger and more foolish, and little heeded by the really bad and hardened ones. If caught, they employed a "'torney," and "ten to one he would get them off." Besides the Magistrates were not too ready to set the stamp of prison life on the young and foolish among them.

Shute and his companions managed to get well into the park (which was a very extensive one) without, as they hoped, being observed by any of the extra watchers known to have been lately employed. Then ferrets and nets were brought out, and the aid of certain evil looking lurcher dogs invoked,—dogs who understood, just as well as their owners, the unlawfulness of their present employment, and went to work in an unhappy, sneaking kind of manner, very different from that of nobler specimens of the tribe, who, with a happy confidence in the lawfulness of their

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occupation, devote every faculty of instinct and energy to their business.

Some of the party meanwhile watched against the danger of a sudden surprise on the part of the keepers; but whether it was that the scouts had not been thoroughly up to their work, or whether their footsteps had been all the while quietly followed, they never understood,—till all at once, from the whistle sounded on more sides than one, they knew themselves to be "caught." Alas, for their boasted bravery! The conscience which makes cowards of us all, multiplied their foes by their fears, and caused it to ooze away rapidly. Precipitately forsaking nets, ferrets, and every other evidence of their unlawful occupation, and followed by the wretched looking dogs, they "ran for it," without further parley or delay.

Nor would they have been a match for the numerous party of policemen and keepers speedily gathered together by the warning signal, had they attempted to justify their proceedings by an appeal to force.

As agreed upon, in case of such an interruption to their amusement, the party separated in various directions, hoping to divide pursuit; in this they

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succeeded, some of the watchers pursuing one division, and two or three only following Shute and the Lamberts.

Bill knew his way about Dene Park. If the Lamberts were "young and foolish offenders," *he* was an "old and hardened one." Compelled in the first instance by a dissolute father to join such parties as this when a mere child, he rapidly proceeded from bad to worse, and now spent his life in pursuits which brought him continually under the notice of the police; though hitherto he had managed "by great good luck," as he said, to escape any lengthened punishment for his evil doings.

Through the beautiful park hastened the young men and the watchers, this lovely Sunday morning, with the best speed of which each was capable. Over the grassy reaches, smooth and soft as velvet; through beds of bracken, green with the tender hues of early summer,—startling the deer from their feeding, the game-hen from her nest, and the feathered songsters in the century old trees. A royal stag raised his magnificent head, and with eyes of amazed disapproval watched the chase which disturbed his does from their pasturing; then, apprehensive of danger for

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his charge, convoyed them quickly out of the track of the runners.

From under their very feet started timid hare or rabbit, taking speedy refuge in its lair or in deeper depths of bracken. Overhead curious squirrels ran along the boughs of spreading oak and elm, marvelling greatly at so unwonted a disturbance of the ordinarily unbroken tranquility.

Thus was the rest of the holy Sabbath day profaned afresh, in God's world and among God's creatures.

By the side of the lake pass Bill and the Lamberts, hoping to conceal themselves between clumps of trees and brushwood planted on its borders; but from the hill-side above more watchers signal to those below the direction taken by the runaways. Presently, however, they arrive at a very densely wooded part of the domain. Bill knows it well,—every tree and bush of it almost,—for he has been here often before. Those who pursue are soon at fault, not being equally well acquainted with the ground, and unable moreover to receive further signals from their comrades on the hill, now hidden from view by the thick summer foliage. Panting, breathless, all but exhausted, the lads

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still gain on their pursuers, lose sight of them, arrive at the park wall, climb it, stay awhile in a neighbouring plantation to recover breath; then are taken by Bill to a low public house and well-known resort of poachers quite on the opposite side of the park from that on which they entered.

Here, considering himself safe, Shute speedily regains his wild spirits, drinks deeply, laughs loudly,—with many rough and coarse jokes at the expense of keepers and police. The Lamberts are more silent. They are tired after their long run; somewhat unnerved too by the fright and their narrow escape. Never before had they so nearly fallen into the clutches of the servants of the law. Capture meant imprisonment: imprisonment involved a certain amount of disgrace; as well as a very much dreaded amount of wrath on the part of their father, of whom they stood in awe, knowing full well what he could be, and do, when once he was roused to manifestation of displeasure.

So they sat somewhat apart, hardly joining in the rough merriment which was going on: too anxious to even heed very much the reproachful jeers and disparaging epithets bestowed on them. Home seemed to the foolish misguided youths

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an unusually blissful and safe harbour at this moment. Never since they were very small boys indeed, had they so heartily longed to find themselves safe within its walls, comfortably ensconced by its fire side. And how were they to reach it unobserved? They must remain where they were, in safe hiding all day, decreed Bill, with many oaths and curses, polluting the Sabbath day, and declaring that he wished he had known what "softs" Ralph and Tom Lambert were. They should never come out with *him* again, that they might be sure of.

They were very sure they never *would* come out again with Bill if once they could get safe back to Norbury and home; but it was still early in the day, and many hours must elapse before darkness would render the return journey safe.

It was made, however, sooner than they anticipated; and in the very company they dreaded. By mid-day the entire party were on their way to Norbury,—but in charge of the police,—who, in some unexplained manner, had traced them after all. Ere evening fell, they had taken up their enforced abode in a police cell, instead of in their longed-for home.

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CHAPTER V.

"THEY SHALL EAT OF THE FRUIT OF THEIR OWN WAY."

NEWS spread like wild fire in the busy, gossiping town of Norbury, many of whose inhabitants like those Athenians described in Holy Writ, "spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing:" only the "new" thing was not always true, but as often as not had no foundation whatever in fact. On this occasion, however, there was a story both true and sad for Norbury gossips to relate. The whole party of poachers, both regular and irregular, were captured in the very act,—taken red-handed as it were. Some of them, moreover, had added to their misdemeanour by using force to resist capture; a regular fight ensuing when they were brought to bay by their pursuers. There were broken heads in plenty,—broken limbs as well; and perhaps serious injury to life,

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said report. Very hard measure would surely be dealt out to the ringleaders in *this* case at all events. Clever indeed must be the "'torney" who should "win the day" for the culprits.

What with the stirring adventures of poachers, keepers, and police, and the fore-casting of probable consequences to the offenders, the gossips were in high feather this Sunday evening.

Here and there one more tender-hearted than the rest put in a pitying word about trouble in store for parents, as well as for some of the youths, who they suggested had been "over persuaded" into this mischief. But King Solomon well describes the "tender mercies" of the wicked to be "cruel." "Served 'em right," was the general verdict,—even by some whose own hands were not altogether clean as to dishonest practices.

A few here and there attempted to defend such doings; and to speak bitter words against the so-called "privileges" of the upper class, as opposed to the fancied "rights" of the working man; but they were mostly restless demagogues, or drunken sots whose opinion carried no weight.

The Norbury working man, as a rule, had no

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evil feeling against the original "lords of the soil," who had, so far, been generous in their dealings towards him; willingly lending parks for gala day or school treat, and throwing open pleasure grounds, or even house, to be seen by admiring crowds of honest working men, with their wives and little ones; who were all the better, mind and body, for a day spent by such kind permission, in pure air, under spreading forest tree; and for the open-mouthed admiration bestowed on treasures of art, venerable buildings, and exquisite flowers and fruit, in well tended gardens, shown to them on these occasions.

Thank God, the feeling of respect still exists in warm English hearts for ancient rank worthily held; as well as for talent, and for deeds of high or noble daring.

Nobody ventured to tell Will Lambert that his sons were "in trouble." Many a gossip would have liked to do it, but then the gossips were rather afraid of Will; and he, pre-occupied with the unwontedly serious thoughts aroused in his breast,—first by the good old woman's kindly talk, and then by his narrow escape from death,—gave no opportunity to the neighbours to engage him in conversation, but went direct to

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his own home, shutting himself in at once for the night.

The tale was told in some form or other to Mrs. Lambert and Alice; but they, alas! were not sufficiently sober when it reached their ears to awake to a full recollection of the facts on the following morning.

So it happened that Lambert was actually on his way to work before breakfast, ere he was made acquainted with his sons' misdoings; receiving at the same time a message entreating him to come to them.

To do him justice, he was overwhelmed with shame and horror. He had led a wild drunken life of late years; but his good up-bringing by pious parents had given him alike a horror of poaching, and of prison, as being a very decided step on the downward path.

Careless Will Lambert! He had forgotten that if he set his sons a bad example in some things, they might not only copy him in those, but might add thereto other mal-practices. And he had forgotten too that in the sight of God "*all* unrighteousness is sin:" that the Word which says, "Thou shalt not steal," excludes alike the "drunkard" from the kingdom of God.

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Very sore he felt against the sons who had brought disgrace on his "good name," as he called it, and had made themselves the subject of such talk. He thought he should never hold up his head among his mates again if he should come to have two sons in prison. Surely the sentence of the law would be severe if the shameful story he heard were true, although no one could tell him exactly what part his sons had played in it.

He was far too angry at the moment to consider that their conduct was but the natural result of the home training,—of their having been allowed to choose what companions they pleased, and altogether, and in every particular, to follow their own devices. No: he was annoyed and mortified principally on his *own* account.

What should he do? Well! he must see them he supposed; but he would give them "a piece of his mind:" and he must pay for a lawyer to defend them. And then? Well then, if they *did* get off, they should never darken *his* doors again, but might go and fend for themselves as best they could.

Before long he obtained an interview with his sons, and told them pretty plainly his opinion of

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yesterday's piece of work; though he could not help being somewhat softened by their evident misery after an uncomfortable night in the police cell, dreading what morning might bring. So for the present he forbore threats, and said nothing about his intention of turning them away from their home.

In truth the young men were sorry enough now,—not so much for the wrong-doing of which they had been guilty, as for the consequences which it had brought upon them. Their only hope was that the magistrates might deal summarily with the case; and allowing for their youth, as well as for the fact that this was a first offence, might let them off more easily than the rest.

When Lambert left his sons, he straightway adjourned to the "public" he most frequented; with the avowed intention of drowning his care in drink. He knew he should find no comfort at home; where at this moment would-be friendly neighbours were giving Nancy and her daughter full particulars of the family misfortune; consoling her and themselves after a fashion akin to Will's.

Thus the trouble-laden hours dragged them-

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selves wearily along in the miserable home that day.

Disorder reigning without remedy—trouble—drink! What *could* be worse? Will thought he had sunk to the very lowest depths of wretchedness as he returned there at night with the knowledge that his sons were in custody in the borough gaol: committed to take their trial at the next assizes.

The case had been so serious, the assault on the keepers so aggravated, that the magistrates altogether refused to deal summarily with it; or to make any difference between the Lamberts and their more hardened companions.

"My son, if sinners entice thee consent thou not."—"Walk thou not in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path. For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood."—They shall "eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

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CHAPTER VI.

"OUT OF THE DEPTHS."

A MISERABLE week followed upon this miserable beginning. There were daily recriminations between husband and wife; who were rarely quite sober.

Alice, instead of being a support to her parents, while they were so depressed, complained loudly of the state of discomfort prevailing at home, and spent as much of her time as possible in the neighbours' houses: when indoors, aggravating her father and mother beyond endurance, by her sharp and undutiful speeches.

Little Nellie indeed would creep up to father's side when he happened to be at home after school hours, and laying her tiny hand on his knee, endeavoured by a silent manifestation of loving sympathy, to do what she might to lighten his sorrow. Nor were the family left without visitors

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of a better kind, who would fain have befriended them at this sorrowful time; and have led them to One who never turns away the weary and broken-hearted, but ever stretches forth hands of loving sympathy to welcome the lost and wandering sheep.

Mr. Howard, known to Lambert as his pastor, —though he rarely or ever saw him where he ought to see him, in church,—and as his little Nellie's good and kind friend as well, heard the tale of trouble that was in everybody's mouth, and came to visit him at once.

But the mortified and angry man received his kindly sympathy with sullen indifference. The more so that conscience already began in his few sober moments to fill him with remorseful upbraidings. When his minister proceeded, as is the duty of every faithful minister of God's Word, to lay before him his sin in the careless training of his children, and to point to his indifferent example as being in part a cause of the trouble that had befallen the family, his faithful rebuke was met with scant civility; and he left Lambert's house inexpressibly saddened by the apparent hardness and utter indifference manifested by both the man and his wife.

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Then came little Nellie's Sunday teacher and spoke in her own gentle way to these poor sin-laden ones, of the Saviour, the great Burden-bearer, beseeching them to cast their load of sin and of care on Him who alone could aid them. Lambert let her talk on; he even listened patiently, because of the love he knew she bore to his darling Nellie. But his wife was loud in her complaints of the trouble which the lads had brought upon her,—of Alice's ill behaviour,—of her husband's refusal to go back to work,—till Nellie's teacher ceased to wonder why the home was so wretched, and the master of it a miserable man. How could things be otherwise than they were with such a wife and mother as Nancy Lambert? So she too left the house saddened; and wondering whether any good could possibly be done among people thus completely steeped in sin, and so very far gone from the right way.

Day after day spent Will brooding by his fireside or drinking in the public-house. Sometimes he would sit at home thinking of his mother, and of her grief could she see him now. Tormented by recollections of his misspent life,—of the careless training of his children, bringing, as Mr. Howard had said, sorrow to his home,—

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of his scolding slatternly wife, and of his bold, discontented daughter,—of his two younger boys, ragged and untaught, following no doubt in the footsteps of their elder brothers,—of the dark future of Nellie, reared in such a home. Yes: he supposed it *was* "his fault," as Mr. Howard had told him so plainly. He *ought* to have taken care of the large wages he earned. He *ought* to have married a more prudent wife; or having married his Nancy because she was a bonnie girl, if somewhat giddy, he should have tried to lead her into those better paths of religion and virtue wherein his mother trained him. He *ought* to have gone to church. He *ought not* to have given way to strong drink, and many another bad habit.

But where was the use of these thoughts *now?* He was too well aware that he was both a spendthrift and a drunkard. He *had* ruined his children, body and soul perhaps. His wife would never reform herself, or her ways. His house must be always the wretched den he and she had made it.

Then he could endure his remorseful thoughts no longer, and putting aside any dim recollections of a Saviour who came to change all this,—to

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set the wrong to rights, to seek and to *save* the *lost*,—he would rush out to drown reflection in drink and all evil.

Satan "led him captive at his will." His soul was in "darkness and the shadow of death, being fast bound in misery and iron." Was there no balm in Gilead? No physician to heal the sin-stricken man? Yes: all day long He who came to save His people from their sins, called this tempest-tossed soul to come to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, to wash therein and be clean; but the evil one, who seemed to have taken possession of him body and soul, "the strong man armed," still kept his goods in peace, still led the wretched wanderer further and further away from the Saviour who waited to receive him, and deeper and deeper into the depths of sin, which came as "a thick cloud" between the sinner and his God.

Returning one evening somewhat earlier than usual from the public-house, half maddened with spirits, vexed because he had been unsuccessful at play, he was "set upon" immediately on his entrance by his wife, with angry questionings as to how long this state of things was to last. Were they to starve? She concluded he did not care

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much for *her;* but there were the little lads, and Nellie he was so fond of,—and he would please recollect that she hadn't even the boys' wages to depend on now: all through his fault,—as he would mind Mr. Howard told him plain enough: and a very true word he spoke when he said so. The torrent of complaints which had been pent up awaiting his return, poured forth so fast that he could not get in a single sentence in reply. Nellie meanwhile, sitting quietly on her little stool learning the morrow's lessons, raised pleading eyes to her angry father,—eyes which entreated plainly as spoken words, that he would not heed her mother this time. But the pale face of the child only roused him to greater anger.

All *his* fault, was it? And was none of it *her's?* The wife who should keep the house decent, and who was such a forlorn object at the present moment,—who had helped to make her sons what they were, to ruin one daughter, and to render the life of this child a burden to her.

Passion took possession of him. The spirit of evil prompted him. Seizing the nearest available weapon, which happened to be the tongs from the fireside, he flung them with all the force of his uncontrolled fury at the wretched partner of

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his misery. His hand was unsteady with drink. The weapon was a clumsy one wherewith to take unerring aim, so it struck—not the wife whom he had vowed to love and to cherish, but the little child who was dearer to him than life.

Right on the clear blue-veined temple; and without word or sign the child sunk from her seat to the ground, eyes closed, still as death.

A horror as of great darkness fell on the unhappy couple, who stood facing each other as if suddenly spell-bound. On the father, to whom the child was so precious; on the mother, who had borne and nourished it.

The whole had occurred in so short a period of time that it seemed like some night-mare dream, from which thought Lambert he would surely awaken presently.

Had he *really* come home but a few minutes ago? Five minutes, or ten, perhaps? Been scolded by his wife, roused to fury by her words, tried to kill her, and injured instead,—perhaps fatally injured,—the darling child dearer to him than his own life? These thoughts flashed through his brain with terrible distinctness while he and his wife yet stood facing one another.

Killed his child! But *was* she dead? He

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stepped forward and raised her from the ground; entreating his wife, who still stood immovable, to come to his assistance. He laid the child on her mother's lap. He fetched water, he bathed the cruel blow on the fair temple, calling meanwhile on Nellie to speak to him, were it only one word, just to show that she still lived. His little love! His darling Nell! Wouldn't she speak to her dad? But there was neither voice nor hearing. Still he thought she lived. He could see the breath go and come, though very faintly indeed, through the pale parted lips. Laying his hand upon the tiny chest, he could feel the little heart flutter tremblingly, like a scared bird ready to take wing.

All this time his wife merely held the child mechanically on her knee, staring with strange vacant looks, not attempting to aid in her recovery. The sudden transition from violent passion to this tragic ending of their quarrel had been too much for her. Will saw that she was rapidly becoming as helpless and as unconscious as the little one lying on her lap: so he went out hastily to summon the nearest neighbour; bidding her "come" in so peremptory a manner, and with such a scared look on his face, that she did not

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attempt to question him, but, following him to his own house, found Nellie lying as he had left her,—on her mother's lap,—the mother, herself, having fallen back in her chair, to all appearance as unconscious as the child.

The terrified neighbour summoned others to her assistance, who amid hushed whispering, and much wondering conjecture as to "how it all happened," carried both mother and child upstairs to bed; while others ran with all speed to fetch the doctor.

Lambert meanwhile settled himself in the old arm-chair in one corner of the kitchen, buried his face in his hands, and so remained; to all appearance completely oblivious of what was passing around him, giving no information, making no reply to all attempts on the part of the women to question him.

Very soon the doctor arrived, and by his orders the house was cleared of those who, as the report of the affair spread far and wide, came crowding into it. Only one or two whom he knew to be capable of rendering him assistance were allowed to remain. By and by he came downstairs to question Lambert as to the cause of the accident. There was no attempt on his part to conceal the sad facts of the story.

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"The missus and me fell out," he said. "Summat come o'er me, and I took hold of poker or tongs fro' th' fireside and threw 'em at her, meaning to quiet her. They missed her, but struck the little lass as were close by. I wish they'd lit anywhere else, I do. To think o' me killing my Nellie!—and I doubt I have done the job, for she would na' speak nor take a bit o' notice afterwards. She'd ha' spoke to her dad if she'd been able."

"Cheer up, man," said the doctor, moved with compassion for the wretched father: "she is *not* dead, and though I cannot be sure yet how it will go with her, I have reason to hope that the injury will not be so serious as you think it. Whatever you hit her with must have glanced aside on its way, and cannot have spent its full force on her. She'll live to be all right yet, please God."

"If you can bring her round, doctor, I'll serve you to my dying day, whenever and wherever I can," spoke Nellie's father, with almost savage earnestness.

Then relapsing into despondence, he covered his face with his hands, moaning out, "Eh, but I dunnot think you *can* bring her round. Sure

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death was plain to be seen on her face,—my own little wench as I loved so true!"

"Don't give way, man," remonstrated the doctor. "Pray to God for her: He can save her life, for nothing is too hard for Him."

"*Pray*, did you say, doctor? Such as me pray! As if God would hear!"

Laying his hand upon the man's shoulder he simply repeated,—

"Yes, I say *pray*, for yourself and for your child. God *never* turns a deaf ear." Then the good doctor having given, not for the first time by any means, "medicine for a soul diseased," went up to try afresh what could be done for Nellie Lambert and her mother.

So the long drawn hours of the miserable sorrow-laden night wore on. Upstairs,—the doctor with many an earnest prayer for blessing on human means and skill, fighting a battle hand to hand, as it were, with death. Downstairs,—Lambert still sitting in his chair absorbed in anxious thought. Sorrow and remorse filled him with the gloomiest forebodings. Owing to his overwrought feelings, fear and dread which he could not overcome, took possession of him. What if Nellie died that night? What if he never heard

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her sweet little voice again?—were destined never more to meet her loving looks of welcome when he returned home of an evening, his day's work finished: or never more to feel the slender arms in loving clasp about his rough neck? Then, as if to increase his sorrow by remorse, the recollection of his sinful conduct both as husband and father seemed to be set in order before his eyes: a dread accusation which would not be denied. As in a vision he recalled to mind his wife, before he called her wife,—a merry, handsome, careless girl, possessing no idea whatever of how to manage a household. An orphan, too, "dragged" up rather than brought up: sent to work at the earliest allowable age on the "coal-pit brow," and never once as girl or woman having received a single lesson in good housewifery. Scarcely able to put in a stitch, to read a word, or to accomplish other than the rough manual labour necessary to earn her daily bread. Yet he had married her, being fully aware of all this,—ay, and had been most eager to win her; for Nancy Lowe was in those days universally admired by her young companions. She could "pick and choose" for a husband among all the young men of the place, belonging to her own

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rank. Every one of "the lads" were at her feet, captivated by her comely face, her bright saucy ways.

And she chose him before them all! He promising to be the best of husbands. And thus their married life began with tolerable brightness; she striving for his sake to give the go-by to her foolish girl companions, and to keep his house as well as she knew how. Alas! that was but very indifferently. Yet he made little allowance for her, expecting, as a matter of course, that she would be able to order everything after his mother's clean and tidy fashion. Finding she could not do so he became harsh and exacting. His wife grew weary of her feeble attempts to satisfy him; then she grew careless, and at last hopeless; letting things drift into the miserable position which had drawn to so bitter an end. His thoughtless cruelty to his wife, as well as his involuntary cruelty to his child, rose up in accusation against him; and he was as yet too downcast and broken-spirited to cherish the hope of a better and brighter life which might come to be his in the future, were he enabled by God's grace to do better, and to "turn over a new leaf."

There was hardly a more miserable man to

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be found on God's earth than poor Will Lambert, waiting in suspense throughout that long long night to know whether his little Nellie would live or die.

Nellie's two little brothers had cried themselves to sleep, lamenting over their gentle little sister's sudden illness; for they loved her after their rough fashion. Had she not shielded them many and many a time from father's well-deserved wrath? Yet they could not help remembering various occasions on which they had ill requited Nellie's kind acts.

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CHAPTER VII.

"ABLE TO SAVE TO THE UTTERMOST."

MRS. LAMBERT had not had "a stroke," as the neighbours deemed it: she had merely fallen into a swoon, from which she awoke by and by; and after a time was able to watch, in company with her weeping daughter Alice and her kind neighbour Mrs. Kay, over the little one who lay to all appearance between life and death.

The sudden shock and imminent danger of Nellie had aroused all the long dormant feelings of affection for her youngest born,—for Mrs. Lambert was by no means a hard-hearted mother naturally; only so completely sunk in the depths of degradation and sin that the most tender feelings of motherhood had been well nigh lost. Now, however, she was quite as much in earnest as her husband in eager longing for their child's recovery. Thus she had roused herself, almost

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before she was able, to do her part in caring for Nellie. Her clumsy attempts at nursing and at carrying out the doctor's directions being, fortunately for Nellie's welfare, ably supplemented by their more capable neighbour.

In the intervals of watching beside the child Mrs. Kay had gathered from Nancy full particulars of the dreadful accident,—particulars which she gave truthfully and clearly, omitting nothing; not attempting to spare herself, or to lay any share of the blame upon her husband.

Mrs. Kay listened: shocked, of course, yet astonished. It was not like rough Nancy Lambert to tell of any event just as it really did occur; especially if it involved self-accusation. But in that silent chamber, over which the angel of death might even now be hovering, and with that sad witness of the consequences of her ill doing before her eyes, how could she venture on an untruth or misrepresentation?

"To think," said she in conclusion, "that it were just my wicked tongue as caused all this mischief. Thee knows that my master is as quiet a man as ever trod i' shoe leather, if folks will but let him alone. As to the little lass, he wouldn't ha' laid a finger on *her* were it ever so.

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Why I really do believe as he loves the very ground she treads upon. 'Tis all along o' me making him mad with my vexin' words: I'm fit to wish mysel' dead, and out of it all."

"You've more call to thank God, as has spared you to try to do better in time to come," replied Mrs. Kay, "than to go wishing such a wish as that. If I was you, neighbour, I'd make shift to say a bit of a prayer for mysel' and th' child."

"A bit of prayer, dost say?" returned Nancy. "Why I've not done that for years upo' years. Well ni' never, I think; unless it were to say 'Our Father' i' a thunderstorm, or oncet when there were a 'blow up' on the pit brow. If there's to be a prayer made, you mun make it yersel', Mrs. Kay. Prayin's not in *my* way; tho' I do feel real bad."

So the two poor women knelt down beside the child's bed. The Christian neighbour who was well accustomed to make known her wants in prayer to her Saviour; and the poor "woman that was a sinner," yet fain would make an effort to bring her weary load of sin and sorrow to His feet who alone could ease her of it.

It was but the first weak effort,—the first stretching out of the hand of one "sinking in

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deep waters" towards the powerful arm put forth to save; but He who spoke words of loving assurance to the penitent weeping at His feet, He who never quenches the smoking flax, will surely fan the freshly kindled flame of repentance and love "till He bring forth judgment unto victory:" till even "this woman that was a sinner" shall be made one of the "daughters of the Lord Almighty;" forgiven, cleansed, sanctified, brought safely through the remainder of her earthly pilgrimage; and presented at last "without spot or blemish" in His presence who loved her and gave Himself for her; wicked, lost, miserable as she had been.

It seemed to them that at the moment their simple prayer ascended to the throne of grace God sent down an answer. As the first rays of the summer morning's sunshine struggled into the forlorn little room, Nellie opened her eyes once more on the things of this world.

Thus the sharp contest came to an end; and through the tender love and pity of our Father in heaven death was *not* the winner. He had comforted and relieved the father and mother in their necessity, giving a "happy issue" out of their affliction. Mrs. Lambert's heart beat high

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with joy, not unmingled with awe. Her prayer had been so very meagre and feeble, the answer was so very swift and complete. Like Jacob of old she felt "surely God is in this place!" realizing for the first time in her godless life His presence who is the hearer of prayer.

The kind-hearted doctor who had taken even more than his usual interest in so gentle a patient, found, to his infinite relief, that consciousness had fully returned; and he, likewise, offered up a heartfelt thanksgiving to the merciful God who had blessed his efforts on behalf of the little one with success. He might venture to hope now that beyond the exhaustion sure to follow on so sudden a shock, no serious consequences were to be dreaded. Nellie was so very quiet a patient, so perfectly calm and contented, that she helped on her own recovery. When the child first regained her senses, Mrs. Kay, who had been sorely distressed by witnessing Lambert's hopeless despondency, slipped downstairs, a glad bearer of happy news to the poor father. There he sat still in the old armchair in the corner of the cheerless kitchen. The glorious morning sunshine streaming in at the window, revealed its cheerlessness to the full, in contrast to its own bright beams. It

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seemed well nigh a mockery that they should rest on, and light up, the figure of the broken-hearted man, who sat there looking the very picture of misery. But the cheery face of Mrs. Kay, as she stepped quickly into the room to tell her news, startled Lambert into attention at once. She could see the first trembling dawn of hope in his eyes even before she had time to speak one word.

"Yes," she said in answer to his look of eager questioning: "Yes, Will Lambert, God has heard our prayers. The child has come to. She'll know thee now. Come thy ways upstairs."

Joyfully, yet tremblingly, he sped up the narrow staircase leading to the comfortless bed-room. He would be able to speak to his little lass again,—his Nellie, with whom he had feared that he should never more exchange a word! But what should he say? She would recollect *who* struck that cruel blow, which had so nearly killed her.

He hung back on the threshold of the room, ashamed, uncomfortable. But Mrs. Kay pushed him forward: Nellie had asked for him. So he stepped across the floor, making painful efforts to tread lightly, and not to disturb the child; for he could scarcely realize yet that she was to live. His Nellie met him with the same tender, loving

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welcome, she always had ready for "father." He knelt down beside her bed, sobs shaking his rough frame: he was completely unmanned with the sudden revulsion of feeling occasioned by relief so complete from calamity so awful.

But the little child put her tiny arms round his neck, clinging, oh so lovingly and tenderly!

"Dad," she said: "never mind, dad!" and kissed him. And so he knew that she bore no grudge against him for his cruel act. No grudge! that she never did. Much as he loved his child he had never fully understood how precious a jewel of perfect love and trust in "father" that fragile form enshrined. He began to understand it now, as with the exquisite tact and discernment of childhood which led her to perceive intuitively what would give him most comfort, she insisted that "dad must sit close aside" of her. From his hand did she receive most willingly the food they brought her. He must raise her up with his strong arm to take it. He must shake up the pillows and lay her down softly among them again.

How gladly did he accept his office of nurse; how tenderly did he attempt it; and how awkwardly did he fulfil it! Yet his clumsy

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efforts brought the ready tears springing to the eyes of his wife and Mrs. Kay, as they noted the earnest solicitude with which he tried to anticipate his darling's wants, watching every movement, every passing change in her looks.

His little Nell! His own once more! He kept repeating it over and over to himself, as if to make sure that it was so. And not his alone,—his child and God's. Had not her life been given back by God; like a miracle, as it seemed to her father? Oh, what a sacred trust did he recognise in that gift, after the terrible night of suspense he had passed; and with a conscience fully aroused to the perception of the failings and neglect of many years past and gone!

Satisfied as to Nellie's prospects, he turned his attention to his wife. She looked a wan and weary object enough in the clear light of that bright summer's day. How great a contrast she was at this moment to the bonnie Nancy Lowe of their "courting" days: and this was in great measure his fault too.

Well, he must try how he could mend matters in future: though he could not help, even amid his joy on Nellie's account, feeling sadly downhearted as he recollected how deeply sunk both

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he and his wife were in sin and degradation of all kinds. How very far they had wandered from "the way which leadeth unto life." In the happy days of his boyhood, when his good mother trained him in all godly ways, she taught him some lessons that he had never quite forgotten, bad as he had become; and now they returned vividly to his mind. Had she not told him of a dear Saviour to be loved and served; of a glorious home prepared for him above? Had she not showed him where it was written in God's Word, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin,"—urging this as one more plea for faithful service on his part to the Master whose will he knew so well? Yes! he knew God's will: it was impossible to deny that. Everything that a God-fearing mother could teach her boy his mother taught him. He had been considered a "sharp," promising scholar, in the village Sunday-school. As a young man he attended church with tolerable regularity till his mother died, and he was induced to come to Norbury in search of work. And since then? Well, he dared not think of what his life had been since his boyhood's days; for he was afraid of "God's reckoning day." He once possessed head

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knowledge; but with a heart untouched as yet. So in time of temptation he fell away, sinking lower and lower, till he became the degraded man he now felt himself to be. God was showing him all the hatefulness of his sin in order that he might learn to look upon it as that abominable thing which He hates,—as that which crucified his Lord: but just as he began to grow quite despondent, and to wonder whether hope could ever brighten his dark path, God sent a messenger to cheer and comfort him.

The poor prodigal, ready to cry out from the depths of his misery, "I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son," should find the Father's heart all love.

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CHAPTER VIII.

DRAWN BY THE CORDS OF LOVE.

EARLY on that happy day which saw Nellie Lambert given back to life, the good old Rector, Mr. Howard, found his way to the Lamberts' house, accompanied by Nellie's Sunday-school teacher, "Miss Margaret," his daughter. On the previous evening tidings of the shocking accident had reached the Rectory, its horrors greatly exaggerated by busy rumour. It was too late then to go to Silver Street, but as soon as possible next morning they hastened thither, hardly knowing what to expect.

Thankful to find that her little Sunday-scholar's life was spared, Miss Margaret went upstairs to see her, whilst her father remained with Lambert.

He found him a changed man indeed. In very different mood from the hard, discontented, and even surly man he had visited after his sons

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were taken to prison for the poaching affray. Mr. Howard met with no incivility now,—with no indifference to the message of which he was the bearer,—but found instead an attentive listener, anxious, nay most eager, to hear all that the minister had got to say to him; a man humbled to the very dust on account of his fault, not making the least attempt to palliate his sin against God in having given full rein to his furious ill temper: only wondering sadly whether forgiveness could ever be obtained for sin so vile; whether lost opportunities could in any measure be atoned for; whether his wretched life could be amended.

Thankful indeed was Mr. Howard that he had the wondrous message of peace to bring to the downcast man,—"Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow,"—and so to hold out the hope of a brighter future in store for Lambert and his wife.

Still, as he looked around upon the untidy comfortless home, his heart sank within him; foreseeing the struggle in store for both husband and wife before a better state of things could be set on foot there. He could but trust and pray that God, who alone can put into our minds good

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desires, might enable William Lambert "to bring the same to good effect." Of one thing Lambert was firmly resolved,—he would go near the public-house no more. The fact of his being drawn there by gay companions had been his first downward step on the road to ruin. He would forsake both, God helping him.

Mr. Howard was only too thankful to hear him say so. He was well aware that whilst Lambert continued to be a drunkard there existed no hope whatever of reformation either for himself or for his family; so he urged upon him most strongly the importance of adhering steadily to this resolution. Not in his own strength—if he did that he would speedily break through it,—but in humble dependence on the same Almighty power which had restored his darling child; perhaps that she might be the means of rescuing her father.

Lambert was greatly touched. Never since his mother's death had he allowed anybody to give him what he called "a good talking to." The kind old clergyman, with his sympathizing manner and his words of holy warning and encouragement, had been enabled by God's grace to touch a right cord in the man's heart, already

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softened by trouble; as well as by the remembrance of the mercy shown to him in his child's recovery.

"Miss Margaret" was welcomed with exceeding delight by her little scholar. The doctor's orders that she should be kept quiet must not be disregarded, so Miss Margaret sat down beside her; taking the little hand in hers, and repeating in her own soft musical voice the well known verse or hymn; while patient little Nellie lay looking up into her beloved teacher's face, happy and pleased above all things to have Miss Margaret "all to herself."

Before he left the house Mr. Howard came upstairs, and they all knelt together to offer up their glad thanksgiving to the God "whose mercy endureth for ever;" Mr. Howard asking the father and mother to join with him in beseeching God's forgiveness for the past; with a petition that He would take into His strong and loving hands the tangled skein of their spoiled lives, so making it straight and smooth once more. Thus the dark cloud of danger and distress was lifted from this humble home.

"When they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, He delivered them out of their distress.

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For He brought them out of darkness, and out of the shadow of death, and brake their bonds in sunder."

After this Nellie went on slowly towards recovery. The neighbours one and all helped in nursing her, or in lightening her mother's household labours. One would offer "to do Mrs. Lambert's washing;" another cooked her husband's dinner for her on the days when Nellie needed most attention. Thus in the numerous ways in which neighbours can aid each other did they lighten poor Nancy's burden: for she found it by no means an easy matter to nurse the child and to "turn over a new leaf" as regarded her household management. The thrifty tidy ways of a good wife were sadly new and strange to rough Nancy Lambert, hard as she tried to learn them. Were it not that Nellie proved so easily pleased an invalid, so grateful for every small attention, she might have found the task quite beyond her powers.

Miss Margaret had told her little scholar that now was the time to glorify God by patient suffering; and Nellie tried hard "to please Jesus" in the way thus pointed out to her: teaching thereby, all unconsciously on her part, many a lesson of patient endurance to those around her.

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Her class-mates came frequently to visit her, bringing their little offerings of love: sometimes it was an orange, sometimes a cake; or, what Nellie appreciated highly, a picture book. One day there came a "dolly," which gave infinite pleasure to the child, who was still unable to run about and join in their merry games. In short, she never lacked welcome visitors who helped her to while away the weary hours; but first and foremost among them all she reckoned her Sunday-school teacher, Miss Margaret Howard. Her sweet low voice, reading or singing to the sick child, would calm and comfort her above everything else; for the fragile little creature could not be expected to recover so rapidly as a more robust child might have done, and she had many an hour of weakness and weariness to undergo.

Doubtless even this was a blessing in disguise. Knowing how she watched and waited for his coming, her father would hurry home from work on these bright summer days, that he might have time to carry little Nell in his strong arms somewhat away from the close street and murky atmosphere, into those fields which still struggled to merit their name of "green fields," on the outskirts of the smoky town. Thus he scarcely

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felt the old temptation to turn in to the "public" on his way home from work. He was too thankful to know that his Nellie waited to welcome him there to give any heed to the entreaties, or even the jeers, of those boon companions who would fain have tempted him back to his former evil ways.

Oh, those wonderful summer evening walks! How they delighted the child, who seemed to have inherited all her father's love for the old country life, of which she had had no experience hitherto. How quick were her powers of observation! What wondrous charms and beauties she discovered in the flowers which her father assured her were "only common ones:" but nothing could be "common" to the little town-bred child in this wonderful "country," with which she was growing quite familiar already.

Sometimes "mother" would be persuaded to come too: and in the new gladness of a sober husband and happier life, began to enjoy those country walks she once cared so little for; and to change her opinion as to its being "dree and dreary" in the country. Sometimes Nellie and her father, sitting in some quiet nook, would have wonderful talks together; talks about the "Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep:" about

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"our Father in heaven," who clothes the lilies of the field in all their wondrous beauty, who watches over and cares for His creatures so that not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without His knowledge. Then Nellie would repeat some of her Sunday-school verses and hymns; discovering, to her infinite delight, that her father knew most of them quite well. So he told her how he too went to Sunday-school when he was a lad, and they compared notes about the lessons he had learned in the quiet village Sunday-school, and those she learned in the large town Sunday-school; and behold they were the very same!

Thus the bread of life "cast upon the waters" was found "after many days." He also told her of his God-fearing mother; till little Nellie began to love "grannie," as she persisted in calling her, almost as much as her son had once loved her. Will's wife, meanwhile, sat quietly beside them; receiving unconsciously much simple teaching best fitting her ignorant mind. What evening spent in uproarious public-house scenes could equal these peaceful summer evenings? What gossip with a rough neighbour, including scandal, or worse, could afford to Nancy Lambert half the pleasure of these once-despised country walks?

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Both she and her husband agreed that never in all the course of their married life had they known so peaceful a time as this, while they waited for their darling to grow strong again. Thus, "drawn by the cords of love,"—that love which had spared their child's life,—they began to make an effort, in dependence on God's help, to amend their lives; to forsake the bad companions, the drink, and all those evil habits which had so nearly proved their ruin.

It is not to be supposed, however, that they found this new life to be by any means an easy one, or that everything went on all at once, as it ought to go on, in the Lamberts' home. Long accustomed to see dirt and disorder reigning around her, and utterly unskilled in careful tidy ways, Nancy Lambert might have given up her feeble attempts to do better in utter despair; were it not, first, for her earnest resolution to serve that Saviour who had raised her from the lowest depths of misery; and, secondly, for the very opportune help and counsel of the same kind neighbour who had helped to nurse Nellie.

Mrs. Kay was the hard-working wife of a steady, thriving, God-fearing working-man. She was also one of those women, a few of whom may

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be found in all ranks of life, who possess the happy knack of giving advice without giving offence. Acknowledged on all hands to be a thrifty, clever housewife, her word was law on all matters connected with house-keeping. Then, where she bestowed advice, she was never backward to give help in carrying it into effect. In this, perhaps, lay one great reason for her success in persuading many of her rough neighbours to amend the condition of their homes. She was also well known never to *take* offence; or to give back an angry answer were she ever so much provoked. She was one of themselves, too, reasoned the neighbours whose condition she was ever striving to better,—only a working man's wife. Her lot was cast in the same station in life as their own; but by God's grace moulded so differently. Thus they were neither afraid nor ashamed of letting her into the little secrets of their daily life; or of asking her help and advice. Over and above all, and as the secret of her influence, humble as was her station, she was a true Christian. Following daily in the blessed steps of Christ's most holy life, whatever she did it was done heartily; "as to the Lord, and not unto men."

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CHAPTER IX.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

IT was Saturday afternoon, and a broiling hot August day. Not a breath of air stirred in the close street. Men, women, and children, sat at open doors, on door-step, on the curbstone even, trying, as they said, "to get cooled a bit." The tidy, thrifty housewives,—who were, alas, but few and far between in Silver Street and its neighbourhood,—were "doing their bits o' jobs o' mending" at the wide-opened door of their newly-cleaned dwellings. They and their homes looking sufficiently attractive even in grimy Silver Street. So much so, indeed, as to be the object of envious remark from lazy neighbours who, having wasted half the morning in bed, or in gossip with each other, now vented their grumbling discontent by remarking upon those who could "set theirselves down to sew of an afternoon like

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ladies,"—all forgetful of the early rising and hard work during the morning hours, which had rendered such leisure possible to industrious wives and daughters; as well as equally attainable to the grumblers, had they only striven to gain it by similar means.

In Mrs. Lambert's home things had "gone cross" on this particular Saturday. She didn't "know how it was for sure," she lamented. She got up when Will went to his work, and began the day with the best of intentions as to the weekly cleaning, which had been inaugurated with her changed life; after many kindly hints and directions from good Mrs. Kay as to the best way of carrying it out. But, unfortunately for herself, Nancy had not yet learned to work with method, and the want of this it was which had brought her to grief to day,—not by any means for the first time.

Her husband, though pleased to find his wife in many respects a "changed woman," yet experienced a difficulty in making due allowance for her awkward attempts at reforming their home life. Still too apt to judge her feeble efforts by the high standard of order and cleanliness he recollected as having prevailed in his mother's

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home, and to expect from his untrained wife similar thrifty ways, he would grow very impatient under the infliction (always a trying one for husbands) of washing or cleaning days. A house full of steam and soap-suds, a kitchen where everything seemed to his masculine eyes to be in disorder under pretext of "cleaning down," would draw forth a sharp word of protest, or an announcement that he should take himself off "till the bother was over, when perhaps she would see fit to give him a chair to sit down on, and a bit o' summat decent to eat."

Altogether life was rather a hard battle for Nancy Lambert just now,—the slatternly, violent-tempered woman who used to be alike a terror and disgrace to the neighbourhood! Not in a week, or a month even, could the misrule of years be remedied; or careful tidy ways be first learned and then put in practice, where the very opposite had been wont to prevail.

Thus it came to pass that while out of doors the neighbours, chatting among themselves, remarked upon the change in Nancy Lambert's manners and proceedings,—a few of them in terms of unqualified approval, others with jeering and scorn, wondering "how long it would last;" how

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soon Nancy would tire of her "goody ways and methodistical notions,"—the object of all their remarks was sadly lamenting indoors, over work slurred instead of thoroughly accomplished, over a weary day of drudgery without method or leisure; over a late marketing, where the money with which her husband now supplied her plentifully could not be profitably laid out.

Struggle on bravely, poor Nancy! "The body of this death" may still cling with deadly persistency; but, "thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord," no uncertain battle is yours. The "Captain of our salvation," when He "led captivity captive," ensured conquest to His followers.

Afternoon has passed into evening, bringing cool breezes and some diminution of the burning heat to the dwellers in the narrow street. Her cottage set to rights according to the best of her power, Nancy sits down for a short rest and breathing time before proceeding to do her weekly shopping. Repose for weary limbs she may find, but scant rest for troubled spirit will she obtain this Saturday evening.

So many different things were conspiring together just now to make her feel "weary and

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heavy-laden." "To will" was present with her, but like the great apostle of old, "how to perform that which is good" she found not.

Suppose she brought disgrace on her new profession,—gave the neighbours good reason to vote it all "talk;" as indeed one or two of them had hinted already, when, after much provocation, Nancy Lambert had "given them a taste of her tongue,"—not to anything like the extent of by-gone days, when it was "a word and a blow" with her. No: thank God, she restrained herself in some measure! "Still it *is* hard *always* to keep one's temper," thought she, with compunction remembering how often she lost it, and not yet sufficiently experienced in the Christian life to be aware that *after* the battle comes victory.

She was rather uneasy about little Nellie too. Those hot summer days in the close confined street began to tell upon her. She did not regain strength as was expected. "A kind of weakness," as her mother said, kept her back; and the child had grown so very dear to her! What if she lost her after all? It was as much for her sake as for Will's that Nancy had been striving so hard to make her home comfortable; and the little one repaid her mother's newly manifested love with

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such tender affection. Invalid as she was, she could often cheer her mother up by a word or a look, and was ever on the watch to pour oil upon the troubled waters when things did not go on smoothly in the newly-reformed home.

Alice, too, was a source of trouble and anxiety, though from a very different cause. She entirely declined to fall in with the new order of things prevailing in her home, and soon after Nellie's illness went back to her former wild and giddy ways, thereby taxing her mother's patience to the utmost.

Long emancipated from the small amount of control that her parents had exercised over her, Alice declared her intention of "going her own gait," refusing to be "bothered wi' any o' these new-fangled notions." *She* wasn't going to church o' Sunday mornings! When she'd worked hard all week she should take a rest o' Sundays, as she had been used to do ever since she could remember. She wasn't going to be tied to come in of a week night before she choose neither. Let her mother mind her own business, said the badly trained undutiful girl, and leave her to mind hers, as she'd been accustomed to do.

Poor mother! she was reaping the bitter harvest

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of years of neglect and bad management. It was no easy matter just then to fight manfully under Christ's banner against the world, the flesh, and the devil; to continue His faithful soldier and servant to the end of life.

Hard and protracted are the struggles of such an one as Nancy Lambert before victory is won and peace attained. "Thanks be to God" that it is always victory, "through Jesus Christ our Lord." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

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CHAPTER X.

ILL-GOTTEN GAINS.

THE short period she could venture to devote to rest being ended, Mrs. Lambert rose somewhat wearily from her chair, donned her bonnet and shawl, and, basket in hand, was just about to sally forth on her shopping expedition, when a neighbour stepped in quite unexpectedly.

A woman, the very picture of what Nancy Lambert herself had been in her worst days,—and in those days Liz Adams had been one of her chosen companions. They had run greedily after all evil together. Now Mrs. Adams was a sad thorn in Mrs. Lambert's side. She affected to disbelieve entirely the fact of her old friend's reformation. "It was just Nancy Lambert's way," she said, "to take up a thing hot and sudden, letting it drop as sudden. Certainly that trouble she had about Nellie was enough to give

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her mother a turn; but once let her get it over, folk would see how soon she would be the gayest among her former set. The more so, perhaps, for her unwonted fit of goodness."

To be disbelieved is always trying; and perhaps Mrs. Lambert felt these heartless speeches more than some open opposition which she had to endure. Then Liz Adams was continually flouting Nancy with her childrens' misfortunes and ill conduct: referring to the sons, who were "gaol birds now," or bringing to her old acquaintance aggravating tales of the mischief her two little lads were sadly prone to get into.

To-day she had come hot haste, bringing a piece of news which she was well aware would prove a distress and annoyance. For that very reason she was eager to be the first to impart it.

"Eh, Nancy Lambert," she commenced, seating herself coolly, quite regardless of her neighbour's evident intention to go out upon some errand: "I've got a grand bit of news for thee, Nancy! Thou hast been proud o' thy Alice's fine voice, I know; but wi' thy new-fashioned psalm-singing ways thou'lt not be so very proud o' it where 'tis heard *now*, I reckon. Unless thou'll give up thy cant once for all, and come and listen to it i' th'

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old place, where thou and I have passed many a merry evening in times gone by, and will do yet, I make no doubt."

"What dost mean, Liz?" faltered she.

"What do I mean, Nance Lambert? Why, *this* is what I mean: There's your Alice Ann singing like a lark, or a what-d'ye call 'em, at the White Horse public. Folks is clapping and calling for more o' her gay songs and ballants. She *is* a bonnie looking wench, I'll allow, and well suited for the place. Rather a differ between them ballants and yer psalms: eh, Nance?" questioned she, with a wicked leer on her evil countenance. "Landlord he offered Alice Ann sixteen shillings a-week if so be as she'd sing regular o' nights. 'Done,' says she: 'it 'ud take me a deal o' hard work to earn sixteen shillin'. 'When must I begin?' says she. 'Begin now,' says he; 'and here's a crown piece for luck.' So she struck up without more ado, and I left her at it. I can tell thee a' th' ins and outs thou sees, because I was having my afternoon's drop with Polly Stone and Sukey Wilson and a lot o' our set."

Mrs. Lambert looked her tormentor full in the face. Her first intention had been to tell her she did not credit a single word of the story; but,

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circumstantially told as it was, there remained no room for doubt. Then her anger rose against one who could thus cruelly torment her; evidently gloating the while over her discomfiture: one who had called herself "friend" in days gone by. In those times the bearer of ill news might have suffered at her hands: even at this moment the temptation was strong to give Liz Adams "a piece of her mind." But she felt that her only refuge lay in silence and escape. Rising quickly therefore (so quickly indeed that Mrs. Adams stepped out of the house in alarm, thereby ridding it of her unwelcome presence), the key was promptly turned in the lock, and Nancy hastened away without one single word of comment or retort.

Left thus unexpectedly to herself, Liz Adams turned on her heel with the comment—"Well, I thowt to take a rise out o' Nance Lambert this time; and were very near doing so if I'm not mistaken. Whatever has come over her? Guess we'll have a fine row when Alice Ann meets her! I'll tell some on 'em, and we'll keep a look out. I should dearly like to see 'em raise th' street again. Its growing mortal quiet, with first one and then another getting took up with these

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Bible Classes and Mothers' Meetins, and goodness knows what besides, that parson's wife and the other ladies is so keen a persuadin' 'em to go to. There's no such thing now as a regular stand-up fight to be seen. Mean spirited lot! I reckon I'll ha' to move to t'other end o' the town. They'll be a persuadin' *me* to go to meetin' next; and no one shall ever have it to say that Liz Adams had ought to do wi' such trash."

After escaping from her unwelcome visitor, Mrs. Lambert bent her steps past the White Horse on her way into town. Stopping for a few moments outside the place of resort once so familiar, she heard her daughter's voice, clear and sweet as a nightingale's, raised in unholy song; noisy applause following at every break in the performance.

What could she do? Should she go in and entreat Alice to desist, and to return to her home forthwith? No: she was well aware that such a course would be utterly useless! Alice would not be controlled or guided by her mother. The landlord would permit no interruption to the proceedings. Besides, when she signed the pledge, did she not faithfully promise Mr. Howard never under any circumstances to enter a public-house again?

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Clearly she could do nothing at the present moment,—except to put up a silent prayer for her misguided daughter. Then, carrying within her an aching heart, she went on her way, finished her shopping, and turned wearily homewards. Who, she asked herself, first took Alice to the public-house? Who, when she was still a child, gave the first glass of spirits and water? Who familiarized the little girl with all the evil to be seen and heard in such a place? Was it not her mother? How then could she hope to induce Alice to abandon these ill-gotten earnings, in a place to which she had been the means of introducing her; and since she grew up had so frequently accompanied her?

Twelve o'clock struck before Alice returned home; a good deal elated with the triumph of her success in singing, if somewhat apprehensive of the consequences of the bold step taken on her own responsibility. With all her efforts to appear unconcerned her steps hesitated on the threshold of her home.

What would mother say? That she would be vexed Alice concluded, since she had taken lately to be so particular. But how would her vexation be manifested?

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Rather to Alice's dismay, she found her mother waiting for her, the other members of the family gone to rest; and the house quiet and orderly, in marked contrast to its condition on Saturday nights not many weeks ago.

"Alice, my girl," spoke Mrs. Lambert; with such unwonted gentleness that even graceless Alice felt somewhat ashamed of herself. "Alice, my girl, if thou had'st need of more money, and could have axed thy mother, she'd have given it without a word, sooner than let thee earn it in places like that; where thou should'st never more set thy foot if thy mother might have her way."

"But, mother," replied Alice uneasily, "where's the harm of singing a song or two provided you can earn such good money for it? I shall take good care o' myself, never fear. Besides the house is as dull as a funeral since Nellie has been ill, so that I can't abide to stay in of evenings."

"Well, Alice," returned her mother, "be that as it may, thee knows we cannot pray 'lead us not into temptation,' if we run into the way of it with our eyes wide open; and I'm afeared 'this job 'll be the ruin of thee."

"Oh, if you come to talk of prayer and that I've done with you, mother! I'm no saint, thank

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goodness. Prayer and such like may be well enough for old and ailing folk: I'll ha' none of it just yet; but I'll warrant I hold my own where-ever I go or whatever I do.

"Come mother," she continued, coaxingly, somewhat touched by her mother's gentle manner, "you shall have the luck penny that landlord give me to begin wi'. It'll buy you something pretty:" and she threw the crown piece into her mother's lap.

"Take it back, Alice: take it back at once," exclaimed Mrs. Lambert. "Do ye think I'd touch money from such a place as that now. It brings a curse wi' it, Alice. Who should know better than thy mother that 'tis the price of ruined souls? I daren't touch it: no, not if I was starving. Come, my lass," she pleaded tearfully, "think better of it. Give it him back, and promise thy mother thou wilt go nigh the place no more."

"Highty-tighty and nonsense, mother!" replied the girl angrily. "I'm none so nice as you, with your new-fangled ways. I'll not lose the chance of earning sixteen shillings a-week for doing what I like right well to do. I'm not quite so green as that! As for the crown piece you are so proud about, it'll do finely to buy a fairing for my Jim next week."

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CHAPTER XI.

"I WAS A STRANGER AND YE TOOK ME IN."

THOSE bright days of early summer which proved so eventful for William Lambert and his family had long since passed away.

Close autumn ones following in their wake caused the smoky imperfectly drained town, with its badly ventilated working-men's dwellings, to contribute its full quota towards the tale of disease and death. Then little Nellie instead of growing stronger, began to fade away,—to wither like the grass in those bright green fields she had been so fond of, but which were growing so very brown now,—scorched and burnt up by the fierce autumn sun. Even her kind doctor looked grave when he saw her; and feared lest consumption should find a victim in the fragile little child, whose wondrous grey eyes looked brighter and more far-seeing than ever,—as if they had caught

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a glimpse of the glory from that "happy land" about which Nellie was always singing softly to herself now. She never complained, except that she was "*so* tired." She could scarcely bear the journey to the once green fields in "father's" loving arms, and had quite left off her attempt to walk so far. The poor father and mother began to fear that their darling would have to leave them after all. Will was a resolute man however, so he determined that "something must be done," in dependence on God's blessing, to save the child. The doctor told them plainly that he did not think Nellie would outlive the winter were she to spend it in close Silver Street. Knowing that Lambert had come from some distance to settle in Norbury, he inquired whether he had no relatives still living in the country to whom Nellie might be sent for a time. But Will had quite lost sight of those distant relations still remaining to him when he came to Norbury years ago.

Brooding sadly over his darling's prospects one evening when she had been taken up to bed by her mother more weary and spent than usual, a bright thought suddenly struck him. Doubtless God sent it in answer to his prayer for "a way to escape" out of his difficulty.

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As soon as ever his wife came downstairs again he began ——

"Nancy, I'll go and ask the old lady as were so good to us that Sunday at Dinglewood, if she'll let our Nellie bide wi' her a bit."

"Eh, Will," returned his wife, "how could'st thou think o' makin' so bold?"

"Something tells me, wife," answered he, "that she won't look upon it i' that light. Didn't she tell us as she had an only son as died? She knows what love is, and she knows what sorrow is. I shall make bold to ask her to take our Nellie in for a bit."

Thinking it the wildest of wild schemes his wife nevertheless did not oppose it. Something must be done, as Will had said, if the child were to be saved; and even if the suggestion came to nothing the walk and the visit to Dinglewood would be good for him, she thought.

So the next afternoon, which was Saturday, he "cleaned up" in good time, and set off on his expedition. Oh, how he enjoyed the change from Norbury town to the pure country air, albeit that the afternoon sun was scorching hot! Love for his Nellie lightened every step of the way; so that he appeared to himself to have

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reached Dinglewood in an unusually short space of time, although it lay several miles distant from Norbury,—and soon he stood once more before the garden gate of the little old-fashioned cottage.

There was Mrs. Royle's husband admiring his "blooms" in the leisure of a Saturday afternoon! Only he was busily engaged this time in tending, as well as in admiring them.

Hearing the click of the latch he put down his rake and came forward. Looking narrowly at Will, he exclaimed: "Eh, Missus, come thee ways out. Here's Master Lambert again, as come to see us that Sunday afternoon, thee knows, and promised to bring his little lass some day!"

"But you looken tired, master; and you've not brought t' little lass 'an you?"

Noticing the sadness which overspread Will's countenance at this question, the old woman quickly perceived that something was wrong.

Had she not been herself a learner in the school of sorrow?

"If Master Lambert has walked fro' Norbury he'd need to be weary, Jim," she said gently.

The old man was not slow to take the hint.

"To be sure, Meggie," he said: "weary he is na' doot." "Well, bring him in, and gi'e him a

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cup o' thy tea, and I warrant he'll soon come round again."

With wondrous tact she forebore to question him until, tea over and his weary limbs somewhat rested, he began to tell them the story of the events that had occurred since that Sunday afternoon when they first met.

Many and varied were the expressions which flitted across the faces of the two old people as the tale proceeded. It was such a tragic tale to be told in that peaceful old-world dwelling. First their countenances expressed astonishment, then horror; finally exceeding relief, when Lambert came to tell of Nellie's recovery, and of his altered and reformed home. But when he went on to describe how his little Nellie was evidently fading away in the stifling Norbury air, the old folks exchanged meaning glances; and as he concluded his story hesitatingly, by saying that the doctor declared Nellie would die if she must pass the winter in Norbury, they both broke out at once —— "Please God, she shall not die, Master Lambert. You mun bring her here at once to bide wi' us."

"Why, if our Bob had lived, we'd a' had little uns o' his coming to bide wi' their granny and

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grandad! We'll have your little Nell, provided you're willin', for the dear Lord's sake, and for Bob's sake as well: won't we, Jim?" said Mrs. Royle, appealing to her husband.

"Ay, for sure, Missis, we will," he returned heartily. "The blooms and the bees 'ill please her finely, I reckon; and she shall come wi' me to farmer Okell's to see t' kine milked, and have a draft o' new milk. They say you don't know what real milk is i' them towns. Ay, ay, she'll soon grow bonnie, please God! It passes my understanding how men and women, let alone little childer, lives at all i' them murky towns."

Thus was Will Lambert's burden of care lifted from his shoulders; even before he had time to prefer his intended request to the warm-hearted old folks.

When he left Dinglewood that evening every detail was arranged. He was to "beg off" on Monday for half-a-day, to borrow a "trap," and to drive his wife, as well as Nellie, over to Dinglewood. For the old people insisted upon it that Mrs. Lambert must come for a few days, till Nellie "got used to them."

They even showed Lambert the cozy bed-room

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which should be theirs. Bob's room once,—and kept in apple-pie order for his dear sake; therefore requiring but little preparation for the guests.

"How charmed Nellie would be to lie there hearing the birds twitter in the ivy outside; or listening to the soft tap-tapping of the tender ivy sprays against the lattice window. Yes, please God, she would surely soon grow bonnier here!"

The old couple were as pleased as possible to witness the delight and gratitude of Nellie's father when these arrangements were all completed. They stood at their garden wicket to watch him off on his return journey, calling after him that he "must be sure and come early on Monday."

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CHAPTER XII.

A HAPPY PROSPECT FOR NELLIE.

IF the walk to Dinglewood seemed short to Nellie's father the walk back again to Norbury seemed shorter still, now the load of anxiety on her account was lifted from his mind.

First and foremost he recognized God's help, in answer to the prayer he had prayed out of his overburdened mind. Then, he had the full measure of reliance possessed by country folk in the health-giving properties of the pure country air they enjoy; free from the fog and closeness which make the stifling town air so hard for human lungs to breathe with impunity.

"It'll be a deal better for my little Nell than a score o' bottles o' doctor's stuff," he thought. "She's bound to grow strong and hearty again in this sweet and wholesome place."

Mrs. Lambert was on the look out for her

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husband. She had a good supper ready for him, and very soon he had told her of his kind reception by the old folks, and of their generous offer for Nellie.

"Ay," said Nancy, "I thowt the old body was a good un' that Sunday afternoon; but I never thowt, Will, as she'd ha' made such an offer."

"She did talk beautiful, Nancy. It fair made t' water come into my eyes to hear her. She said as how she'd do it all for our Nell because she was one of the Lord Jesus' little ones; so it would be t' same as takin' in the Lord Himself. And she put on her 'specs' and showed me where it was written down in her big Bible. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye did it unto Me.'"

Nellie's delight in the proposed arrangement knew no bounds; it was only lessened by one thought,—she must leave "father" for a while. There was one thing, however, that Nellie felt she must do before she went to Dinglewood. She must bid good-bye to Miss Margaret Howard. So she sent a message to morning Sunday school, by her special friend and class-mate, Susie Wylde, to tell Miss Margaret of the happy prospect in store for her; and to beg, as a very great favour, that

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she would come to see her little scholar before she left. Therefore, as soon as afternoon school was over, Miss Howard came down to Silver Street. She had watched with considerable apprehension little Nellie's gradual decline. The child must certainly not go away without a parting word from her teacher: it might be the last good-bye before they should meet again in the presence of their Lord. She found Nellie lying on a "settle," opposite the open door, anxiously on the look-out for her.

"O teacher!" said she, "I *did* want to bid you good-bye. I am so glad you came!"

"Of course I came, Nellie dear," rejoined Miss Howard. "Did you think I could let you go without saying good-bye. Susie has told me all the news, Nellie; and I am glad you are going to Dinglewood, for it is a pretty place; and you will enjoy being in the 'real country' you have so often wished to see, shall you not, Nellie?"

"Indeed I shall, Miss Margaret;" answered the child, her face lighting up with pleasure. "It will be something like the Garden of Eden, you told us about: won't it teacher?"

"It is lovely, Nellie; but not like the Garden of Eden. Can you tell me why?"

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"Do you mean because of sin, teacher?"

"Yes, Nellie, I do;" replied Miss Howard. "You must not think because the country itself is fair and beautiful as God made it, that the people who live there are any better than those who live here in Norbury. Sin is everywhere, dear Nellie: perhaps not exactly the same kind of wrong-doing, but yet sin in God's sight. That is why the Bible tells us that when the Lord Jesus comes to reign, 'there shall be a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.'"

The child lay considering for a while; at last she said, "What if I don't come back again, quite well, as father says I shall, Miss Margaret? What if I never come back at all?"

Looking at the bright eyes, the flushed cheeks, the little thin form, Miss Howard thought it all too probable that Nellie might, as she said, "never come back at all."

"Well, dear Nellie," she replied, "I hope it may please God to let you grow strong again, at Dinglewood; but, suppose you never did come back again, dear child,—does that make you afraid?"

"Oh no, teacher!" said Nelly, brightly. "I am not afraid. There is the Lord Jesus, you

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know, and the 'happy land;' but I was thinking about father: he would miss me, and so would mother, though I am nought but a trouble to them now. Suppose they began to go to the 'White Horse' again, if I went away for good and all, teacher!"

"Why, Nellie!" said Miss Howard, "did you not tell me your own self, that when father used to take you to the green fields this summer, you saw how God watched over, and took care of all His creatures, even the very smallest. And now you cannot trust Him to take care of your father and mother. I believe they really do belong to Jesus now; and you remember how He told us that His sheep 'shall never perish.' They are 'Safe in the arms of Jesus,' Nellie."

So Nellie was comforted; and presently Miss Margaret took her leave,—after commending the little one and her parents to the tender care of Him who watches, with unwearying, never-ceasing watchfulness, over His beloved.

That Sunday evening, after her father and mother came home from church, and were sitting quietly beside her couch, it became evident that Nellie had something on her mind which she wanted to unburden to "father." She looked at

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him wistfully now and then. She stroked his hand as he sat on his arm chair at her side.

Strange as it may appear, considering his former wild life, the child had a great reverence for him, —God-given, no doubt. Then she had always seen the best side of his character, for he was kind and considerate to her, if rough and quarrelsome with others. This made her very tender of his failings: with humility and discretion beyond her years, she never spoke of them to the neighbours, or alluded to them in her father's presence.

Only God knew what a safeguard it had been to this man to know that there was at least one human creature who believed in and trusted him.

At last, finding longer silence to be impossible, Nellie spoke out. "You'll miss me, dad, wont you?"

"Ay, that I shall, my little wench!" he answered quickly. "I shall miss thee sorely; but if I know that thou art comin' round, I shall be content to miss thee."

Then followed another silence. "You've never signed teetotal, have you dad?" she asked timidly.

Her father looked at her. He could see very plainly now what was passing in her mind.

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"You're afraid I shall go to the 'White Horse' after you're gone, I do believe, Nell," he said. "Please God I shall never darken its doors again; but I'm noways unwilling to sign teetotal for all that."

"Will you, dad?" she said gladly. "I should like it." So he 'signed teetotal,' to Nellie's entire satisfaction.

Nellie and her father and mother had a fine day for their journey to Dinglewood. Such a clear breezy day, after the intense heat, that even Norbury town looked bright and cheery,—as it could look sometimes, if weather were very propitious.

Will Lambert had "begged off work," as he arranged with the Royles. A kind friend had gladly lent a "trap." Nellie had been lifted into it and made comfortable with pillows and a big shawl; and now a little knot of neighbours are gathered around for a farewell word or kiss before she leaves Silver Street. As they take note of the child's fair and delicate face—refined even more than its wont by illness—many a mother with little ones of her own at home, raised the corner of an apron to wipe away the unbidden tear, which *would* spring up; for smiles, not tears, must speed little Nellie on her journey. So, amid

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many a cheerily-spoken "Good-bye, and God bless you, Nellie Lambert; send you safe there, and bring you back hearty and strong;" the trap drives away, leaving the neighbours to discuss Nellie's prospects before they disperse to their several homes.

Most of them agreed that Nellie Lambert looked far more likely for the next world than for this; but one among the group, a very old woman, though hale and hearty still, took a more cheery view of the question. "Come, now, neighbours," she said, "I've lived i' this world longer till most of ye, and I've seen them as has been brought a great deal lower than Lambert's Nellie (God bless her), come round, and grow up strong as other folk; so we'll na' be doubting God's power or His goodness, but we'll just put up a bit of a prayer instead, for t' little lass: ay, and for her father and mother. I doubt it would be an ill day for them if ought were to happen to Nellie. Take an old body's advice," she continued smilingly, "and don't be meetin' your troubles half way. If God sends the heavy burden He will fit the back to bear it, that you may depend upon; but *when* the burden comes, mind you, and not *afore* it comes."

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CHAPTER XIII.

NELLIE AT DINGLEWOOD.

IT would not be sufficient merely to say that Nellie was heartily welcomed at the Royle's cottage; for old Mrs. Royle fell in love with the child from the moment she first saw her,—took her into her motherly arms, and gave her a warm place in her motherly heart there and then, and for many a long year afterwards.

She fancied that she had discovered some likeness to her Bob "when he was a little one;" and this was quite enough to win her love for Nellie, had the child been a less winsome little creature than she was.

Lambert was able to report, in answer to many kind inquiries with which sympathizing neighbours beset him on his return to Norbury, that "Nellie had settled herself down at Master

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Royle's as if she might ha' lived there all her days."

Thus the mournful shadow that had been overlying the Lambert's home was in a fair way to be altogether dispelled; for when Lambert went over to Dinglewood the following Saturday, to see Nellie and to bring his wife home again, he was cheered beyond measure by finding that even a few days of the fresh country air had made a visible change for the better in his darling child. And had not Dr. Farnham said that if she once "took a turn" she would soon mend! So her father and mother thanked God, and took courage, returning to Norbury with hope and good cheer in their hearts.

Strange to say the only one to whom Nellie's coming and going—almost her life or death—appeared to give no concern whatever, was her sister Alice. She even showed herself somewhat jealous of the care and thought bestowed upon the ailing little sister, of whom she took scarcely any notice. May be she felt the beseeching look, or word of entreaty on behalf of better things, that the child would sometimes venture upon, to be a constant reproach to her in the gay and giddy life she was now so determined to lead;

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or may be she was too much absorbed with what she called its pleasures to take any heed concerning her sister.

She still persisted in carrying on her engagement at the White Horse, notwithstanding all that her parents could say by way of inducing her to give it up. Thus she speedily lost the good opinion of all friends worthy of the name. Of all except Miss Howard, who still continued, partly for little Nellie's sake, to notice the giddy girl on the rare occasions when they met; bestowing kindly smile and greeting, as well as urgent words of entreaty that Alice would forsake her evil ways, "ere it should be too late."

Strange as it may seem, Alice still clung to this last vestige of a respectable position. She would even go out of her way to pass down a street where she knew she would in all probability encounter "Miss Margaret;" although she took no notice of her remonstrances, and, apparently, but little of the kind though sad greeting she had been eager to obtain.

More than once had "Miss Margaret's" God-given patience and unvarying kindness been the means of restoring lost ones to the right path; so she would never pass by this erring girl with-

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out notice,—and with a silent prayer as well, that God, "in the pitifulness of His great mercy" would loose the heavy chain of sin which bound her hard and fast. "Speak gently to the erring one" was Miss Howard's mode of action in such cases as Alice Lambert's. "Hope on: hope ever!" her motto; and a very cheering and encouraging one had she found it so far.

Gentle Margaret Howard was a great power in her father's parish; where she made it her special vocation to work among the girls and women employed in factories, and on "coal pit brow." If she found her work hard, and even trying sometimes, she received the full reward of her labours in the devoted affection of those among whom she laboured; and the souls God gave for her hire.

When "Jim" heard of Alice's proceedings, he speedily sought her out, and the two had a very stormy interview; for Jim insisted, as the condition of his continuing to "keep company," that Alice should "sing no more songs at the White Horse public."

The headstrong girl, roused to anger, puffed up with the applause won by her really fine voice; and determined to assert her own in-

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dependence for very oppositions sake, told him there were "as good fish in the sea as ever were caught." He might choose a sweetheart where he liked, for all *she* cared.

Now, James Graham was a really respectable youth, if somewhat easily led. He was, moreover, very fond of the gay, handsome girl he had courted for the past twelvemonths; yet he was unwilling to continue a courtship which could only result in unhappiness for both parties.

The risk he had run on the Sunday excursion—the punishment which had overtaken Alice's brothers—Nellie's dreadful accident—all had roused Jim to "consider his ways." Illustrations innumerable he had before his eyes of the melancholy truth of the prophet's question: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Therefore, James Graham, sad at heart, but warned in time, gave up Alice Lambert.

Alice, in her turn, resolved to brave it out,—to show to everybody that she "cared not a rap for the lad." She still professed to live at home; sleeping under her parents' roof, and sometimes, though not often, coming home to meals. Her mother utterly refused to touch a penny of her ill-won gains; but endeavoured to make her as

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comfortable at home as the headstrong girl would allow.

It was *the* last hope for Alice. Marvellous was the patience with which the formerly ill-tempered mother, and tyrannical father, endured the whims and disrespect of their misguided daughter. Did she once forsake the protection of her home she would be lost indeed!

So the months rolled on till "fresh October" had come in; bringing frosty nights and boisterous windstorms, which helped to clear away remnants of fever lurking in unwholesome courts, before November damp and fog should swell anew the list of sufferers. Nellie was still at Mrs. Royles' cottage at Dinglewood, "as happy as the day was long," she said; and not only happy, but rapidly growing "strong and hearty." A very few weeks worked a very great change in the delicate child. She seemed to grow and flourish "like flowers in May," as old Master Royle pointed out exultingly to Lambert, on one of the frequent occasions when he had come over to see for himself how Nellie was getting on.

The good old man and his wife were never tired of dwelling on her perfections. A less humble-minded, unselfish child might have run

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the risk of being spoiled; but Nellie followed too closely in the steps of Christ's most holy life to be troubled with self-conceit, so she was not easily spoiled.

The few days that Nancy Lambert spent with the Royles when she took her child to stay with them at Dinglewood, were of infinite service to her; for she gained health both of body and mind. The old country woman's simple, kindly advice, was gladly put in practice on Nancy's return to her home in Norbury. Mrs. Royle's well-ordered house was, as Nancy declared, "a perfect picture;" and above and beyond all, her bright example of holy living; as well as her perfect peace and joy in her Lord and in His salvation, did more than anything else to convince Nancy Lambert of the real happiness and complete enjoyment of a life that had God for its beginning and end; making His service the aim and object of every action. Since that visit to Dinglewood Mrs. Lambert had materially improved the condition of her home, which already began to wear an aspect of considerable comfort.

Pleased with her persevering effort, her husband, having his mind set at rest about Nellie, found leisure and occupation in taking an active interest

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in its well-being. He little thought six months ago that he should begin "to feel proud" both of wife and home. With a portion of the wages now rescued from the publichouse he purchased various useful, and some ornamental articles of furniture.

Even at this late autumn time, the window was green with the plants which Will, in loving remembrance of the old country life, and with a thought of how they would please Nellie by-and-by, made his special care. A big clock, facing all comers, ticked with undeniable respectability in that corner of the kitchen opposite the street door. A comfortable old "settle" stretched down one side of it. Chairs, dresser and table, were clean and whole, and boasted their full complement of legs. A few good-coloured prints of sacred subjects adorned the walls; recently papered by Will. At opposite corners of the mantle-shelf, as if keeping guard over the little array of chimney-ornaments, the delight of Nancy's heart, stood a shepherd and shepherdess, serene and prosperous-looking, attired in marvellous fashion; each smiling upon the other, and doing their courting with untiring persistence of dumb eloquence, wonderful to behold.

A canary sang gaily in his cage, suspended

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from the ceiling. A matronly-looking cat sat on the hearth below, blinking at the brightly-burning fire, and enduring Dick's brilliant song because she knew she must; having learnt perforce that difficult lesson of "live and let live." Consoling herself may be, with reflections on the clever manner in which she had this very morning discovered the haunts of a small family of mice; ensuring a delicious supper when the house should be quiet for the night. At all events the complacent manner in which puss licked her lips, and cleaned her sleek fur, appeared to render some such supposition not wholly unwarrantable. In all these home improvements many a thought was given to Nellie, and her pleasure in this or that alteration or addition; and consideration for her, would often urge both Lambert and his wife to persevering effort. Nellie still remained at Dinglewood, for the simple reason that Mrs. Royle would not hear of parting with her; and the doctor quite agreed with Mrs. Royle that it would be running a great risk to bring her back to Norbury in winter. So, though they missed her sorely, they were most thankful that she might stay with her kind friend throughout the winter.

Nellie was not idle by any means at Dinglewood.

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The "blooms and the bees" had proved quite as great an attraction to her as Master Royle expected; and farmer Okell's "kine" were her very good friends already. As to the farmer's wife, Mrs. Okell, she was rapidly becoming as fond as possible of winsome Nellie Lambert: she showed her how to hunt for eggs, she let her feed the chickens, she taught her to overcome the natural timidity of a town-bred child at the sight and sound of gobbling turkey, putting himself in warlike attitude, in the highest degree alarming to Nellie's nerves; or of hissing gander, warning away all intruders; she initiated her into the mysteries of butter-making, curd breaking, and cheese-room; till Nellie, delighted beyond everything, decided within herself that the lot of farmer's wife must certainly be as near an approach as was possible to one of earthly happiness.

Old Mrs. Royle speedily discovered in her pupil aptness to learn all household duties, of which her small strength was capable. She had nimble fingers and tidy methodical ways; therefore the old woman soon began to take the greatest pride in training and teaching so docile and capable a learner. Beside all this, Nellie Lambert

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was known already at the village school as one of its most regular scholars; both on week-days and Sundays. Thus occupied, time passed quickly; and she was indeed and in truth "happy as the day was long," as she had said.

Well might her father and mother unite in hearty thanksgiving to our Father in Heaven, who had raised up such friends for their child.

Under the care of these good old people, Nellie learnt wondrous lessons concerning that "wisdom which cometh from above." Lessons which lasted her a lifetime.

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CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE SMOOTHING ROOM.

AT one of the most extensive glass works in Norbury, the big works bell rang out the hour of one o'clock.

A troop of girls and women, healthy and hearty-looking for the most part, if somewhat rough, came crowding into the "smoothing shop" ready to re-commence their labours. Some of them set to work eagerly at their appointed task of polishing the large sheets of bright glass; anxious to lose no time, and to secure a good sum by "reckoning day."

Others, chiefly the younger ones, gathered in little groups gossiping on various subjects; but principally intent on discussing a printed notice which somebody during the dinner hour had affixed to one of the large pillars supporting the roof of the spacious work-room. The notice

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under discussion, set forth that Mr. Howard intended (God willing) to hold a "mission" in the Parish Church of Norbury. It explained, moreover, the object of this mission: that it was a course of services and meetings, in which a special effort was about to be made to awaken souls,—"that those who are in sin may forsake it, and turn to the Lord; and that those who have already sought Him may be stirred up to greater devotion and diligence." Everyone was earnestly invited to come, and urged to bring a friend or neighbour as well.

The prayers of God's people were asked for the contemplated effort. Each one of Mr. Howard's parishioners was entreated to take an interest in it, to help where they could, at all events not to hinder any from coming; "or to put a stumbling-block in the way of those whom Christ loves," by speaking lightly of the mission.

"Come to the mission," said the notice; "urge others to come to it; pray for those who conduct it; pray for the grace of God's Holy Spirit upon it:" concluding with the solemn words of warning,—"now it is high time to awake out of sleep. The night is far spent, the day is at hand."

Foremost among the group gathered round

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the notice stood Alice Lambert, her voice raised in noisy protest and ridicule.

"More new-fangled notions of the parson's," quoth she. "I wonder what he'll be at next? We shall have all smoothing shop turning methodists I reckon, and as mum as mice.

"I'll ha' nowt to do wi' it, and if you'll be said by me *you'll* ha' nowt to do wi' it neither, lasses. A short life and a merry one say I! We want no psalm-singing wenches wi' long faces working in *this* room."

Merely waiting until noisy Alice had finished her irreverent speech; and until the scornful laughter of those like-minded with Alice had died away; a nice looking girl, more neatly dressed than most of the workers, stepped forward.

Pale she looked, if determined. It was no easy matter to bear witness for her Lord before those who scorned His name and His servants.

"You should think shame of yourself, Alice Lambert," she said, in a calm decisive voice, "to speak in such a manner of Mr. Howard's doings; when you know, too, that Miss Margaret is the only one among the quality who'll give you so much as a look.

"As to the mission, I hope we shall all go to

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the services next week, and that you'll not be able to hinder a single one by your foolish words. *I* mean to go girls, and if any of you'll come with me you'll be real welcome, and I'll find you a seat in church. Miss Margaret begged of us last night at the girls' club to bring as many as ever we could to the services, so I mean to do *my* best to persuade all I can."

"Oh, Ellen Kay!" interrupted Alice sneeringly, "we knew what you'd say about it! You with your steady hum-drum ways, like any old woman's; you haven't one bit of spirit; but you'll not find it so easy to persuade *some* of us to go to meetin', I can tell you."

"Why I'd well nigh as lief be laid i' my coffin at once't, as give in to *your* solemn psalm-singing ways. Mission or no mission, you'll not find *me* inside of a church next week; or any other week either."

So the talkers dispersed to their frames, and the polishing of the huge plates of glass went on steadily; but before the day's work came to an end, poor Alice Lambert's choice appeared only too likely to have been made in terrible earnest.

The cause of all the mischief was merely some rough joke with a fellow-worker; followed by a

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hasty push. Then a catching of Alice's dress in the ceaselessly whirling machinery, drawing both it and her slowly, but surely, within its fatal embrace. Shrieks and confusion speedily arising on all sides. A brave forward rush from Ellen Kay, who at the risk of her own life draws back her fellow-worker from the very jaws of death.—A stopping of the machinery, and all the busy hum of work. Finally Alice Lambert's insensible form laid in a cart and driven slowly homewards.

"Mission or no mission," *she* could not be at church next week. Perhaps "not any other week." God only knew.

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CHAPTER XV.

A MOTHERS' MEETING.

ALL unconscious of the terrible catastrophe enacting at the works, Alice's mother had spent the afternoon according to her usual custom, at the Mothers' meeting held every Wednesday for the working mens' wives belonging to Norbury parish.

It was a wonderful and interesting scene, that Mothers' Meeting, and might even claim a place along with "works," factories, or mines, among the "sights" of the flourishing town of Norbury.

In a large and well-lighted schoolroom sat nearly two hundred women, all busily at work. Some were occupied in knitting socks for husband or children,—knitting with such marvellous rapidity that the bright steel needles twinkled in and out of the worsted, clicking with a speed which rendered it impossible for the eye to follow their movements.

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Here and there a kindly disposed neighbour, pausing in her rapid work, held out at arms' length a skein of worsted for a friend's winding; or initiated a less knowing one than herself into the mysteries of "narrowing" or "turning a heel."

Those who preferred sewing to knitting were instructed in the composition of marvellously gay and taking patchwork quilts and cushion covers. These workers were superintended by a lady who took the "patchwork" under her special care; cutting out and arranging the bright prints with skill and excellent design;—highly gratifying to the "mothers," if one might judge by the glee with which a quilt, when pieced and lined, would be held up for the inspection of the meeting. In many a working man's home in Norbury, gay bed-quilt or chair-cover bore testimony to the industry and regular attendance of "the missis" at "Mothers' Meeting."

While knitters and needlewomen were thus busily employed, Mrs. Howard and her helpers read, by turns, some interesting book. Usually a story calculated to cheer, and help by force of example, the working men's wives in their every-day life. A life ofttimes beset with difficulties,

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trials, and temptations, of which more favoured wives and mothers have little notion.

Hymns, sung at intervals, accompanied by a harmonium, diversified the proceedings; which Mrs. Howard made a point of rendering as little "stiff" and as cheery as possible. She was well aware that some of these poor women looked upon Wednesday afternoon as *the* bright spot in a weary work-a-day life.

The story ended, members of the clothing club paid in their savings, to be ready for Mary's "new frock," on "walking day," perhaps; or for "Joey's new boots" (as that lad is for ever on the ground wi' his feet); sometimes with the object of giving a pleasant surprise in the bestowal of some warm article of clothing needed by "my master"—as husbands in Norbury are designated. Or maybe the savings were devoted to providing a Sunday outfit for the "mother" herself; who, being now rescued from a God-forgetting past, and from a thriftless life besides, felt an earnest desire to join, in decent apparel, the "multitude who keep Holy-day;" to enter into the courts of the Lord of Hosts, there to praise and thank Him who had raised her up from lowest depths of sin; "to take the cup of sal-

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vation," and "to call upon the name of the Lord." For many of the women sitting here this afternoon, "clothed, and in their right mind," had been, like the poor demoniac of our Saviour's days on earth, a terror to the neighbourhood in which they dwelt; having won for themselves an unenviable notoriety as evildoers, drunkards, and brawlers. Such an one, for instance, had Nancy Lambert been.

As Mrs. Howard looked round upon the mothers now so happily occupied, she thanked God and took courage; recalling to mind the past history and once miserable homes of many who were now earnest and sincere Christians, living with the one object of glorifying God in their simple home life.

Truly that same grace of God which regenerates the soul, has a marvellous effect in raising and reforming the life. No other civilizing process can equal that which makes "all things new." Nor can we separate the one from the other. Is not faith without works "dead, being alone"?

A quarter-of-an-hour before closing-time, knitting was wound up; gay quilt and cover deposited in their respective bags. When all sign of work had disappeared, and the workers were quietly

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settled in their places again, Mrs. Howard read to them a passage she had chosen from God's Word; following up the reading by a few words from herself, showing in what respect it was specially applicable to the spiritual and temporal needs of the women she loved, and whose varied trials and troubles she knew so well.

Many a face "weary and worn" did she see before her. Some to whom life's battle was proving a hard struggle,—every inch of the way contested, sword in hand as it were. Some who, humble though their position, were to be reckoned among the noble army of Martyrs; so true and faithful were they to the Lord they served, amid surroundings of temptation or trial, faithfully resisted, unflinchingly borne. Some again, to whom the lines had fallen in pleasant places; who were happy in their homes and prosperous in their circumstances; whose ship of life sailed upon calm waters, wafted by gentle breezes towards the haven where they would be.

As the precious promises and precepts were read out to the motley group, and comfort drawn from the one, or observance pleaded for the other; weary faces grew hopeful, lines of care disappeared for the time from harassed counte-

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nances; and bright faces grew brighter still. Here was hope for the hopeless, courage for the faint-hearted, strength and happiness alike for weak and for strong: a word in season for everybody.

The "lesson" ended, helpers and mothers were commended in prayer to the loving care of a tender Saviour; to the guidance of the Holy Ghost the Comforter. Then all wended their way homewards, strengthened and refreshed for another week's work. Each ready for the lot "Our Father" had in store for her, be it one of joy or of sorrow. Little dreamt poor Nancy Lambert, as she eagerly drank in every word of comfort or encouragement uttered by Mrs. Howard, how very soon she would require all the consolation they could convey. Those stormy years of her wretched past seemed to have drifted quite away from her. She hoped to be a dweller beside the still waters in future. But now, suddenly and all unexpectedly, her little bark became tempest-tossed again.

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CHAPTER XVI.

ON A SICK BED.

IT was a sad home-coming for Alice's mother that Wednesday afternoon. She entered one extremity of Silver Street just as the cart bearing its sorrowful burden, apparently more dead than alive, arrived at the point nearest to Lambert's dwelling.

Poor unconscious Alice had been very carefully and tenderly conveyed homewards by one of the works carters. He was a neighbour, and had "known Lambert's wench from a little 'un," as he said; wiping away a tear which *would* come trickling down his dusty cheek. Besides he had two daughters of his own at work in the "smoothing shop," therefore his sympathies were the more fully aroused.

Who could say that a similar accident might not some day happen to one of them? Should

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anything so dreadful ever befall a lass of *his*, would he not feel grateful to anybody who cared for and tended her, as he was trying to care for this poor lass? So he avoided every rough place and every loose stone, which might jolt the cart and cause increased suffering to its occupant.

Long before Alice reached Silver Street news of the accident that had befallen her found its way there. A sort of telegraphic communication which bids fair to rival the speed of electricity, would seem to exist for telling misfortune's tale; so rapidly do tidings of "an accident" overspread the town of Norbury.

Passing from lip to lip, like the war-signal of olden days; in an incredibly short space of time everybody whom it concerned, as well as a good many whom it did not concern, but who only listened to the story with all its sickening detail out of morbid curiosity and love of the horrible, had heard that "Lambert's girl was well nigh crushed to death; if indeed she were not already dead."

Thus it came to pass that by the time Joe (the carter) had accomplished his painful and difficult task, and with an audible expression of his thankfulness that "at least the lass hadn't died

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upo' th' road," drew up his cart at the door of Will Lambert's house, quite a little crowd had assembled, awaiting the arrival of the injured girl; a crowd hushed and awe-stricken indeed, as people are wont to be in the possible presence of death, that "king of terrors:" not wanting in sympathy, or by any means slow in expressing it; but unfortunately for the comfort of the sufferer, equally full of curiosity.

"Now then," spoke Joe Griffiths hastily, half vexed with those who came crushing up to the side of his cart, half wishful to hide his own feelings, "stand back, can't yer, while we lifts this poor wench inside: you've seen all there is to see when you've looked upon her white face! Ay," he added, "'tis a weary day for Will and his missis: even if t' lass lives she'll not do much good, I reckon!"

And—"Ay, 'tis that indeed!" re-echoed the bystanders.

By this time Mrs. Lambert had come from the Mothers' Meeting; Will, too, had arrived on the scene, fetched in haste from Bowstead's yard; and thus, for the second time within a few months, a daughter of the house was carried all unconscious up the narrow stairs, and laid—not upon a

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wretched dirty bed, as poor Nellie had been laid, —but in one where she would find all the comfort possible for her suffering frame. In a simple room, simply furnished; but clean, tidy, and fresh as a maiden's room should be, whether she be of high or low degree.

And *not* dead? No: thank God, not dead.

In wrath He had remembered mercy. He had stretched forth the hand of His might to check the thoughtless girl on the road to destruction.

"So far shalt thou go, and no further," had been His decree; and then this creature of His hand, who had gone forth a short time before in possession of health, strength, and every power of mind and body; but using all these good gifts to defy the God who gave them, lay a shattered wreck on a bed of suffering: brought, whether she would or not, to a recollection of the God she had forsaken and defied; brought with fear and trembling, face to face with death, eternity, and a neglected salvation; yet far too much racked with pain and terrors of a world to come to find any rest for her soul. She was dreadfully injured, said the doctor, who had obeyed with all speed a summons calling him to the aid of the suffering girl.

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There was a broken limb, besides some internal crush inflicted by the cruel machine, which might prove more or less serious. At the same time he held out hope of recovery: a hope which seemed like new life to poor Alice, terrified beyond measure at the prospect of death.

For every one trusted Dr. Farnham.

Some time since he might not have allowed himself to give so hopeful a report; but he was aware of the Lambert's altered circumstances, and he knew what an immense difference these would make in their daughter's prospect of recovery. A year ago he would have considered it barely possible that Alice could pull through; with neglect and rough treatment to be added to the injuries she had received. Now, he knew she would have tender care; and every comfort that her father and mother had the means to procure. She had youth on her side, and the advantage of such skill as it was his to bestow. That was skill of no mean order, for Dr. Farnham possessed a great and well-merited reputation in Norbury; where, alas, constantly recurring accidents gave opportunities for acquisition of experience to the clever surgeon.

Over, and above all, she would have God's

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blessing on the efforts to be put forth for her recovery; on her mother's tender nursing; on her doctor's skill. Lacking that, he would have considered human means to be of small avail; for, like St. Luke, "the beloved physician" of Bible story, he was a devoted follower of the "Great Physician," acknowledging His directing care and providence amid all the "chances and changes of this mortal life."

Full well knew Dr. Farnham how numerous are the lives sacrificed among the working class for want of good nursing, and attention to the simplest laws of health. Many a medical man loses heart altogether when he finds his directions imperfectly carried out, if not utterly neglected.

Little children, youths and maidens in the morning of life, sink into an early grave, whose lives might probably have been saved had the home been less degraded, the wife and mother more worthy of that sacred name. The doctor or the clergyman turns sadly away from the home where death has thus entered, comforting themselves as best they may with the thought that the child has been taken away from the evil to come,—from an ill-cared-for life, without God and without hope.

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Oh mothers, would that you could all realize your awful responsibility in this matter! How will you answer to the Judge of quick and dead in that great day of account, for the care—or no care at all—you have bestowed upon the immortal souls inhabiting those bodies He intended to be "temples of the Holy Ghost;" but which you by example and influence have despoiled, ruined, rendered fit only for the indwelling of the prince of darkness? "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?" Is it rent and torn? scattered and lost? Or have you so guarded and tended it that you may hope to appear in that great day with joy and gladness in the presence of your Lord—you, "and the children that God has given you"?

Stay awhile, and reflect while opportunity offers. Think, ere it be too late, of the awful prospect of a parting which has no meeting; or of the terrible companionship of the lost in that place where "their worm dieth not." Of a divided family: divided for ever! Who can endure to picture so awful a possibility?

As William and Nancy Lambert stood by their daughter's bedside that night, they could thank God, even while witnessing the

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suffering she endured, that He had given her time to repent and amend her ways; also that He had allowed them an opportunity of undoing some of the mischief they had wrought by the evil-doing of past years. Never had their daughter Alice been so dear to them as now when she lay on a bed of sickness; with the prospect of many weeks of anxious nursing on their part, and of patient endurance on hers.

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CHAPTER XVII.

"TIMES OF REFRESHING."

THE much talked-of Mission Week had arrived at last. It was to commence on a Sunday morning in November. A day, smoke-laden and fog-laden, after the manner of November days in Norbury, as elsewhere.

It was not to be held without much previous preparation. First and foremost, "Prayer had been made without ceasing, of the Church, unto God" for it. And "the Church"—that is, all the company of God's faithful people, looked for the release, in answer to its prayers, not of one, but of many prisoners during this Mission Week. Of prisoners held in far closer bondage than that of St. Peter, delivered in answer to the supplication of the Church of early days; of immortal beings "tied and bound with the chain of

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their sins,"— living their short space of life here below "without God and without hope."

To prayer had been added work.

Mr. Howard made an earnest appeal for help in preparing for the mission. In response to this appeal a band of Christian men and women, some belonging to the upper class, some to the working class, came forward and visited every house in the parish; explaining the object of the contemplated services, and urging the attendance of both rich and poor when the time for them should arrive. They even penetrated into the very worst and lowest parts of the town, thus endeavouring to fulfil their Divine Master's command: "Go ye into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled." Having accomplished all that lay in their power by these means, they left results to God, waiting in simple faith till He should "give the increase."

Through November fog and mist sounded the church bell, calling together this little band of workers to inaugurate the mission services by meeting together "early in the morning—" almost indeed, "before the break of day—" around the table of their Lord. As they took into their hands the memorials of His death and sacrifice,

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"Jesus Himself drew nigh." Their hearts were filled with His redeeming love,—their souls were refreshed,—their zeal renewed. And as at the conclusion of the service they offered themseves anew, "souls and bodies, a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice" to the Lord, in whose name they met together, they felt it to be in truth a glorious and precious privilege to unite in that solemn early morning service.

At ten o'clock the sweet peal of bells belonging to Norbury Church sounded forth, if possible, more harmoniously than ever, summoning the congregation to meet within the walls of the beautiful old building. There had it stood for length of years untold; when "Northenbury" (as it was then called) was but a tiny village in the midst of a thickly-wooded, thinly-populated country. Restored or enlarged as time passed on, and a town arose round about it, it had accommodated generation after generation, who came to worship the Lord of Hosts; or to praise Him "in the beauty of holiness."

Comparatively few of the multitudes who had from time to time assembled there belonged now to the "Church militant." By far the greater number had joined the "Church triumphant;"

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but those on earth and those in heaven could still unite in one blessed "communion of saints," to worship and praise Him who redeemed alike His Church on earth, and His Saints in heaven.

The grand old prayers, containing petitions for "all sorts and conditions of men" were reverently read by the Rector; the responses heartily uttered by his people; intervening hymn and chant ascending as sweet incense before the throne of God. Then followed a sermon by the mission preacher. The congregation, always a large one, was larger than ever that Sunday morning: many sat there who, as they confessed, had not "seen the inside of a church for years upon years;" and, as the preacher stood up in the pulpit and opened his Bible to read his text, every eye was fixed upon him.

He was a man gifted with rare gifts, of speech, of voice, of manner,—gifts consecrated long years ago to his Master's service; for he was a tried and honoured servant of God, wise to win souls as well as mighty in the Scriptures. While he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, like Felix of old many a poor sinner "trembled."

Next he proceeded, out of the fulness of his

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own heart which had experienced its power, to speak of that precious love of Christ which passeth knowledge; and soon, by the influence of God's Holy Spirit, hard hearts were deeply moved; eyes unused to weep, shed tears of sorrow for the love slighted and excluded during a whole lifetime. The power of the Lord was present to rouse and to heal sin-stricken souls. Thus, "showers of blessing" descended on the thirsty land; floods upon the dry ground.

That first mission service was but one among many equally blessed in the unfolding of the "old, old story of Jesus and His love;" and the winning of many souls "from the power of Satan unto God."

Larger and larger grew the congregation each night, until the fine old church was filled to overflowing.

Hardened sinners convinced at last of sin, and terrified for fear of the "wrath to come," found refuge in the hope set before them in the Gospel.

Backsliders, who had forgotten God and the good ways of their youth, wandering farther and ever farther from the road which leadeth unto life, were brought sorrowing to the feet of Jesus, there to find pardon and peace.

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Children of God were strengthened and revived, going forth thereafter with renewed power from on High, to work for their Lord with increased zeal.

It was "a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" long to be remembered in Norbury. A time when the good old Rector reaped the harvest of years of hard and anxious work, received the answer to many prayers.

William Lambert was among the number of those weary and heavy-laden ones, who found rest to their souls. He was enabled to cast his load of sin and misspent years upon the Great Sin Bearer. At the foot of the cross the heavy burden rolled away. He saw it no more, and went on his way rejoicing; for he had the full assurance now that Nellie's God was His God.

Greatly to Nancy Lambert's disappointment, she was able to attend but few of the services and meetings. One that she did attend, however —Will meanwhile taking half a day's holiday to look after Alice,—she never forgot.

It was a special service for mothers,—held on Wednesday afternoon, at the usual hour for the Mothers' Meeting. The mission preacher had chosen his text from the fourth chapter of the

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second book of Kings: Elisha's interview with the Shunamite mother. Nancy felt as if every word of that sermon were addressed to her.

As the preacher closed a most earnest address, he besought each mother to ask herself the Prophet's question: "Is it well with thee?" "Is it well with thy husband?" "Is it well with the child?" And to give herself no rest till she could answer—"It *is* well."

Oh, thought Nancy, however shall *I* answer! For herself and for her husband she might say, "It is well." Will's happy face when he returned last night from church had told her, without need of words, that he had found that "peace which passeth all understanding."

Doubtless it was "*well*" with Nellie, who had so early given her little heart to Jesus; but how was it with poor Alice, lying at this moment weary and restless on her sick bed, angry that God should have suddenly deprived her of health and strength; leaving her, as she considered, with small prospect of "enjoying life" in the future? For Alice was proving a most fretful invalid; sorely taxing her mother's powers to keep her "quiet," as the doctor declared to be absolutely needful.

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Only those whose minds are "stayed on God" know what it is to be "quiet." Alice had been so fully determined to have nothing whatever to do with those things that belonged to her peace; how could she feel otherwise than restless and ill-contented with herself and with every one about her? No: Mrs. Lambert could not say that it was "well" with her daughter Alice.

Then there were those two lads of her's in prison. Who should say it was "well" with them? As she thought of their sin, their present disgrace, and of all they might have to suffer in consequence of it, she felt sorely grieved and humbled. For how much of the trouble might be said to be "her fault!" Those two poor lads: how she *would* try to make it up to them when once she got them home again!

Then the idea took possession of her mind that if she could only get this wonderful minister to come and see her Alice, what a grand opportunity it would be for her girl. Could she "forshame to ask?" Yes: she felt she *must*. She *could* not let the opportunity slip past. So, after much inward hesitation she remained behind after the service, and preferred her request through Mrs. Howard. To her great satisfaction she received a promise

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that "the minister would certainly visit Alice that afternoon."

All the rest of her life Alice Lambert had cause to thank God for that visit. The weary suffering girl, "well-nigh tired of life,"—but "feared above all things o' dying,"—as she described herself, was at length willing to listen to the "sweet story of old," —the story which tells of the loving sympathy of that dear Saviour who "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." She said little at the time in reply to the words of comfort and good cheer spoken to her by God's messenger. But the Lord opened her heart to attend to them; so by-and-by they bore good fruit.

Thus the happy Mission Week drew to a close; and with all its privileges, warnings, and opportunities, became a thing of the past.

And what of its results?

Only the great day shall fully declare them. Many wandering sheep had heard the Shepherd's voice. There had been "joy in the presence of the Angels of God over sinners that repented."

But as evil ever contends with good in this sinful world of ours, so were there some who entirely refused to listen to oft-repeated invitations to consider their ways and turn to the Lord.

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Among these were Liz Adams, and others like her. They steadily declared that nothing on earth should ever persuade *them* to go near church or meeting. So they defied the God who made them,—the Saviour who died for them: walking in the broad road to destruction, spite of warning and entreaty.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A BRIGHT PICTURE.

A COUPLE of years have gone by since the story of Will and Nancy Lambert's life began to be told.

After that winter spent with the Royles at Dinglewood, Nellie had returned to Norbury "fresh as a new blown rose," her father said. It must be confessed, however, that the lily as well as the rose strove for the mastery in Nellie's fair face. Probably she would never be a robust child, like many of her sturdy little playmates and school companions: yet she promised to grow up with no small share of health and strength, thanks to God's blessing on the tender care of those kind friends of her's at Dinglewood. Nellie's great object of ambition at the present time is to

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fit herself for the post of under-housemaid at the Rectory by and by: a post which her beloved "Miss Margaret" had half laughingly promised,—"if she turned out a very handy girl indeed." To this end she is always eager to put in practice at home those household lessons so gladly taught her by Mrs. Royle; and it is marvellous how useful the child is, with her methodical little ways, in helping to keep things in order at home. Her mother thinks there will be no doubt at all about Nellie's fitness for the situation, upon which she has set her mind, when the right time shall come for her to think of it: for Nellie is quite her mother's right hand now. Always willing, always obedient, and sweet-tempered as ever, the little light of her daily life shines bright and clear: a witness for the Lord who redeemed her. She was the very joy and rejoicing of her father's heart; while between Alice and her little sister there existed now the truest sisterly affection and good fellowship. Had they not both one Lord, one aim in life, one home wherein they looked to dwell together when life should be ended?

Once more it is a Saturday in early summer; and Mrs. Lambert, Alice, and Nellie await the coming of the husband and father. No fear of

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his returning home drunk this afternoon, for since that never-to-be-forgotten day when his furious passion had well nigh proved so disastrous to his child, not a drop of drink has passed Will Lambert's lips. That teetotal pledge, signed at Nellie's request, has, by God's grace and help, been faithfully kept. The blessed effects of that glorious mission week have been abiding in Lambert's house, as in many others. Church, Sunday class, the Table of the Lord, find unfailing attendants among the members of this household. Their home bears ever increasing evidence of the vast improvement that has taken place: a more comfortable working man's dwelling, of a simple kind, was not to be met with in all the town of Norbury.

"The missis has got most things she'd set her mind on," says Will. And certainly "the missis" takes good care of her possessions, judging by appearances.

Many comforts have been added lately, which Nancy exhibits to her friends with pride and delight. Not the least of these is a tiny greenhouse, which her "master" has built in the back yard, where fine healthy plants flourish,—and even a vine grows; unhurt by the smoke and "chemicals,"

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so fatal to all attempts at outdoor gardening in Norbury.

Will has formed an intention of "going into a building society," and of having a house of his own at no very distant date, should God spare him. He and Nancy have begun to "save up" with this end in view.

Will makes his wife a sharer in all his plans and prospects now. The heart of her husband can safely trust in her. He watched her brave efforts to learn to guide her house in the fashion which every Christian woman should achieve. And he has learnt not only to love, but to respect his wife.

The supper laid out this evening on the snowy white cloth is in very decided contrast to that hastily-obtained, ill-cooked supper, described in the opening chapter of this story. Such a happy state of things has not been attained without much effort on Nancy's part,—without many prayers and great patience; besides tears not a few, on account of failures. But "she persevered," as she says, till, with God's blessing on her efforts, she made her home what it ought to be.

Alice sits quietly sewing on a corner of the

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big settle. One would scarcely recognise in her the bold, rough-looking girl of two years ago: certainly not the weary, fretful invalid of the time of that terrible accident. She recovered more rapidly and completely than Dr. Farnham had ventured to anticipate. "Made whole," both body and mind.

"Alice mended from the day that minister came to see her," says her mother. Probably she is correct in her opinion. It was then that Alice got her first ray of hope, for this world and for the next.

She never went back to work in the "smoothing room:" she was not so robust as she had been; besides, her mother was glad of her help at home,—for Alice was a very great help and comfort to both father and mother now. She is better looking than ever. "As bonnie as her mother used to be," says Will. "Far more bonnie," says his wife. And she is right.

Alice wears a joyous look of happiness on her fair face which was not to be seen on her mother's face in girlhood, or ever will be seen there now, perhaps; for Nancy Lambert has one great trouble. —She never had the opportunity of "making it up" to her sons when they were released from

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prison. Their time ended just when Alice was at the worst after her accident. Absorbed with grief and anxiety on his daughter's account, their father quite forgot his half formed intention of going to meet them on coming out. Tidings of the accident that befell their little sister had reached her brothers; but no word of that complete change which occurred immediately afterwards in the habits of their father and mother. They merely heard that owing to Nellie's illness their father "took on so" he had forsaken all his former companions.

Remembering his hasty temper, they were afraid to venture home; where, as far as they knew, nothing but discomfort awaited them. Somehow or other Ralph managed to obtain a passage to New Zealand, and on his voyage got a mate to write, announcing the fact to his mother. "He dared not face his father," he said; "but he meant to try and do better in future, for the prison chaplain had given him and Dan many a good talking to." Perhaps it was as well for him to get away from Norbury and bad companions. "When he had made his way in New Zealand, which from all he could hear tell was a grand country, he should send his mother some money.

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Meanwhile she must not be sorry; and his father must try to forgive him."

Poor fellow! Had he but known how anxious they were to prove that they *had* forgiven him, he might not have been quite so ready to forsake home and country. Of their younger son's whereabouts they could obtain no intelligence, beyond a vague rumour that he had gone off to Newcastle in search of work.

This was *the* dark spot in their brightened existence. The two sons who might have been Will Lambert's pride and delight had experienced so little happiness at home that they were quite ready to leave its shelter; and that at the very time when it might have proved to them all that a home should be.

It was the old story again: sin brings sorrow! If a man *will* "sow the wind" he must expect to "reap the whirlwind."

As far as lay in their power the poor father and mother tried to make up for lost opportunities by taking every care of the two younger sons remaining to them. These lads were kept at school and trained in all good ways. Infinitely to their mother's relief they improved rapidly; giving promise of a bright future. But as she

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looked at the now healthy, well clad, well behaved boys, she could not help thinking, with many a weary sigh, how sadly their brothers had been neglected when *they* were little fellows.

Mothers, be warned in time! Influence once lost is hard to regain. From years of neglect you will surely reap the harvest of an aching heart.

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CHAPTER XIX.

HOPE OR DESPAIR?

WHILE the fate of Lambert's sons has been recounting, the family have finished supper. Alice, ever on the watch to spare her mother, has deftly and quietly put away the supper things. No wasted crusts shall you find in Mrs. Lambert's pantry *now*.

Then Alice reached her mother's knitting, and took up her own sewing once more; Nellie and her little brothers began to prepare collect and verses for their Sunday-school class on the morrow, and father to read his paper,—when the proceedings were interrupted by the unexpected entrance of Mrs. Kay.

Lambert welcomed her heartily. He had a sincere liking and respect for good Mrs. Kay: as who had not amongst her neighbours? With

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an apology for disturbing them, she intimates that she cannot stay to-night, having merely looked in to beg that Alice and her mother would accompany her to Liz Adams.

They knew she was very ill,—Mrs. Lambert having helped to nurse her. Now Mrs. Kay tells them that Liz has taken a change for the worse, and wishes to see them without delay.

In a dark close court off one of the main thoroughfares of Norbury, Mrs. Adams' miserable house was situated. It is even a grade lower than was the Lamberts' home as first described; for it merely consisted of one room downstairs and one room upstairs. The upstairs' room is entirely divested of furniture: a heap of shavings in one corner calls itself a bed, on which four children sleep at night; but what wretched pretence of a bedstead there is has been brought downstairs for the sick woman to lie on: it is merely a "squab," with chaff-stuffed mattrass and pillow. The bedclothes—a couple of ragged sheets and one blanket—are almost black with filth. Ragged children run constantly in and out of the miserable place, clamouring for food, ruthlessly disturbing the mother who lay there in pain and misery untold.

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Her husband is a brickmaker. His wife has acted as his assistant, until exposure to weather and indulgence in drink brought on a liver complaint, of which she was dying.

The united earnings of the couple amounted to two or three pounds a week. Both were drunkards. The husband was a gambler as well,—hence their miserable home. It would be well-nigh impossible to find a more awful illustration of the condition of human beings, "without God and without hope."

The sick woman turned round feebly, as her old friend entered. "Nance," she said, "I wanted to bid thee good-bye, and thy lass too. We've had many a spree together in old times; afore thou grew so partickler, Nance Lambert. I've laughed and jeered at thee for a saint, since then; but I'll laugh no more now. Them should laugh as wins; and *thou art the winner*. I doubt it's all up wi' me, Nance. Thou's been rare and good to me this spell o' sickness. I'd bid God bless thee, were it any use;—me, that's been given only to curse, calling down blessings on a body!"

"Oh, Liz! Liz!" besought Nancy, the tears streaming down her face, "pray for thysel' while there's time. The Lord will give heed even

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though thou *hast* been such a sinner. *I* was the same and He heard *me*."

For one moment, the brilliant black eyes which had won for Mrs. Adams the nickname of "bright-eyed Liz," were fixed searchingly and wistfully on her friend's face; then they closed, and she turned her head wearily away.

"Nancy," she whispered, "dost thou remember the mission last year?"

"Ay: and thank God for it;" replied Mrs. Lambert.

"Well, returned Liz, *I* refused to go nigh t' church, thou knows. I said as no one should catch *me* at such places; and no one *did*. Nor no one *will:* that's more!"

"But," urged Mrs. Lambert, "you can pray *here*, Liz, as well as in church."

"And *I* tell *you*, Nancy Lambert," said the sick woman, raising herself on her bed with the energy of despair, "that 'tis *too late now*. I *would* not heed before: I cannot heed now! Eh, Alice!" she continued, "I was as bonnie a lass once as thou art. Drink, and gay ways like thou once followed, proved my ruin. Thank God thou wast stopped i' time, and turned over a new leaf; else maybe thy end would ha' been like mine.

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If I could but be a wench like thee once more, I might do different; but 'tis too late now. Too late!"

No answer but this would she return to all their remonstrances,—to every entreaty that she would pray to God for mercy.

At last Mrs. Lambert and Alice were compelled to leave her, being wanted at their own home; but Mrs. Kay stayed behind and sat up with her throughout the night.

As long as the dulled ear could hear or the clouded mind comprehend, she prayed beside her; or whispered of the forgiving, never-failing love of Jesus, "mighty to save."

"'Tis rare good hearing," said the dying woman; and so passed away.

"Who shall measure out God's mercy, by the span of human thought?" Or say whether, even at the last moment, this poor soul sought and obtained forgiveness?

"The day shall declare it."

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CHAPTER XX.

"WEDDING BELLS."

YET another interval of years, and once again the bells of the parish church ring out bravely,—on a week day this time, for they are "wedding bells." Through the crisp frosty air of a bright December day comes the sound of the joyous bells: over all the town of Norbury, far and near, they may be heard. Faster, and ever faster they ring—like a peal of merry laughter: up in the old belfry the ringers are doing their work with a hearty good will. They have to announce to the good folk of Norbury not one wedding only, but three! Well may they do their very best to make "all whom it may concern" aware of the fact.

First of all there is "Miss Margaret's" wedding. That of itself is quite an event for Norbury: everybody loves gentle Miss Margaret Howard.

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Friends of her own rank are numerous: friends of a humbler rank are numerous also. As some old gossips, who stand around the churchyard gate awaiting the wedding party, have it,—"She's the bonniest young lady in all the country side, and as good as she is bonnie; besides having a way with her as comes round you, whether you will or no." An opinion which meets with hearty assent from all who are within earshot of the kindly old women who have given utterance to it.

Finding themselves encouraged, they continue: "She will be missed! *Surely* parson 'ill miss her; and many another body besides. Theres t' girls o' th' coal pit brow and glass house,—they're in a fine takin'. *They'll* give more tears than smiles to her wedding day, *I'll* be bound!"

"Ah!" says gossip number two, who likes to look on the bright side of a question, "its not as if she were going away to 'furrin parts:' her new home 'ill be but a few mile off, I reckon, so we'll be seein' her amongst us now and again."

Further talk however is suspended, for the wedding equipages roll up, and are gazed at by crowds of eager and interested gazers. On all hands it is agreed that their beloved "Miss

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Margaret" looks as "beautiful as a picture;" and that the "groom" is "a personable man eno'."

Bright are Margaret Howard's prospects with the best of all brightness,—that "blessing of the Lord which maketh rich." Wealth, and position too, will be hers: gifts, which she will know how to use for the service of her Lord; even as she has used all His gifts from her earliest years.

Mingled feelings of joy and sorrow find place in the hearts of the good old Rector and his wife. They will miss her, as the gossips opined; yet they cannot but rejoice in their daughter's happiness.

Miss Margaret's wedding is over, and the bride, bowing and smiling her acknowledgments of the loving greeting bestowed upon her, has driven away; still the crowd do not disperse. They await those two other weddings, almost equally interesting to them; for have they not known "brides" and "grooms" "'sin they were little uns?"

Presently they come up, amid hearty cheers and good wishes. The brides—Alice Lambert and Ellen Kay. The bridegrooms—James Graham and Ralph Lambert.

It had been the great wish of both girls to be married on Miss Margaret's wedding day. "Did

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Mr. Howard think that Miss Margaret would object?" Far from objecting, Miss Margaret highly approved, for Ellen Kay and Alice Lambert were among the most hopeful and regular attendants of her Sunday afternoon Bible Class.

Quite a little romance might be woven out of the story of these two weddings. When Alice Lambert recovered her health, after that memorable accident, she likewise regained her sweetheart. It had been a real grief to him to surrender Alice; and the terrible accident which befell her only revealed to him how much he loved her still. So one day when she was recovering and able to be down stairs again he asked to see her.

"Alice," he said, "I reckon thou and me had best make it up." Looking wistfully to see how "saucy Alice" would take his proposal.

But she was "saucy Alice" no longer,—only a very humble girl, hoping to retrieve time wasted and misspent.

She answered meekly enough: "I might be a burden to thee, Jim, did I not grow hearty after this sickness. Doctor says I'se not be good for work i' th' smoothing shop again."

Quoth Jim, "I'll take thee, Alice, if thou'll say 'Yes,' burden or no burden. And as to work, I

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reckon I can work for us both. My wife 'ill not need to do more than keep her own house trim and straight."

James Graham was "out of his time" now; a "fitter" by trade, and earning good wages. He was a teetotaler besides, and, as a natural consequence, he had saved money. So this morning Jim and Alice were married.

He had prepared the cosiest of homes for his bride. Not in one of the long close streets; but in a row of pretty cottages, newly built in the outskirts of the town, where air, light, and cleanliness were more easily attainable.

If Miss Margaret's prospects were bright, so were those of her humble friend,—now Alice Graham.

But the history of Ellen Kay's courtship "read like a book," as the gossips one and all declared. Her new-made husband, Ralph Lambert, was a man of considerable importance in the eyes of his former acquaintances; for he owned land and "beasts" in that far away country, New Zealand, and might hope to be a prosperous man some day, by means of hard work and God's blessing.

Ellen was voted a very lucky girl indeed. She,

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however, was well aware that her future happiness rested on a far surer foundation than that of mere "luck." Otherwise she might have hesitated to leave her happy home for "foreign parts,"—even with her husband.

And this is how the story came about. When Ralph Lambert landed in New Zealand he felt forlorn and lonely enough at first. But by God's great mercy the teaching of the good prison chaplain had taken deep root in a heart softened by trouble; thus he was preserved from sinking into the depths of drunken dissipation, which proves the ruin of so many young men in our colonies. He felt that he had got a fresh start in life, and he determined, God helping him, to make the best of it. He went "up country" not very long after landing; and there fell into the hands of a good master. A young English gentleman, who had come out with a moderate capital, determined like Ralph Lambert to make the best of the new life in the new country: always with God's blessing.

To him Ralph told his story, concealing nothing. The young man, pleased with his frank honesty, took a liking to him, engaged him at once; and for some years they worked together, clearing the

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land or superintending the herdmen. During this time they lived under canvas. Many a wonderful tale did Ralph relate for the edification of his friends in Norbury, illustrating the fact that English settlers have to rough it in a new country. However, the climate was splendid,—the nearest public-house scores of miles distant; so Ralph Lambert, removed from temptation and placed under good influences, throve amazingly, body and soul.

His master, discovering his gross ignorance, taught him to read and write during the long winter evenings. Above all, he taught him marvellous lessons of the love of Jesus,—of the tender pity of our Father in heaven. The young Englishman had been brought up in a godly home, by a Christian mother: in this strange land his mother's teaching came back to him with a force and reality never before experienced. Whilst teaching his humble companion, he taught himself. Together they vowed that God should be their God for ever and ever,—their Guide, even unto death. So they "worked and prospered," for God was with them of a truth.

They built a log house, and Lambert became a sort of bailiff to his master; but was able to

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take up a small lot of land for himself, which he cleared. Then he, too, built a log house.

In process of time his master married an English wife. Lambert began to feel lonely. Why should not *he* get married? Years ago he had admired Ellen Kay, and would gladly have courted her; but she refused "to look at" so careless and godless a suitor. Perhaps Ellen was married by this time: a good girl like her would, he felt sure, have suitors in plenty. Then he grew restless, and the log house appeared a very dull and silent abode. At last he confided in his kind master, who laughingly recommended him "to go and find out for himself." Happy with his own wife, he felt more than willing to assist his faithful servant in obtaining a like blessing; and from Lambert's account of her, he felt persuaded that Ellen Kay would be that blessing. He promised to superintend their joint business during his absence.

So Ralph Lambert made his way to England again, to see and obtain forgiveness from his father and mother, as well as to look for a wife. The joyful meeting between them may be imagined. Will and Nancy Lambert knew that their son was doing well in New Zealand, for

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letters had often passed between them; but they were scarcely prepared to find, in their formerly wild and graceless lad, this fine, prosperous-looking man.

Ralph, in his turn, was delighted and amazed beyond measure, to witness his parents' altered life, and to find them equally prosperous.

True it is, that "godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come."

Moreover Ralph Lambert found the "Ellen" of his boyish days, Ellen Kay still. Whether she had always entertained a liking for him, or whether she had found no suitor sufficiently attractive to induce her to forsake her comfortable home, she did not say; but, finding her old lover as much changed for the better as were his father and mother, she no longer "refused to look his way." So their courtship progressed smoothly, till the wedding day brought it to a happy conclusion.

* * * * * *

Some weeks after that day, when the wedding bells rang out so merrily in Norbury, a small party might have been seen standing on the deck of one of the large emigrant ships lying in the river Mersey.

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As good and evil contend for mastery in this chequered life of ours, so likewise do smiles and tears. And this party is a tearful one.

Ralph Lambert and his wife are about to sail for their far-distant home in New Zealand. The others have come to "bid good-bye, and see the last of them." A long good-bye, most probably; for time and money alike forbid the prospect of their re-crossing the broad ocean from their adopted country. They have had to recall their prospect of a meeting in that happy land where the inhabitants "meet to part no more," before they could at all reconcile themselves to part to-day.

The warning-bell for passengers going ashore has rung; so with fond embraces, and fervently-uttered prayers, the friends make their way down the ship's side, its bulwarks crowded with emigrants saying last words to loved ones going ashore.

Then the good ship sails away down the river to the sea. Ralph tells of their new home, its prospects and delights, hoping to cheer his weeping wife. The sorrowful parents make their way back to Norbury, and go to spend the evening with Jem and Alice; to whom they convey last messages of love from the voyagers. Ere they separate for the night they commend themselves

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and their dear ones to the ever watchful care of the God of all grace.

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The little child who had been desirous above all things to please her Lord perfectly, grew up into a comely maiden, anxious, now that health and strength were hers, to "serve Him much" as well; letting her light shine among her fellow-servants, even as it had shone in her home, to the

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glory of her Father in heaven. She still remained gentle and refined to a degree unusual in her class of life. Partly for this reason, and partly that she had shown herself so capable of instruction, "Miss Margaret," when she married, took Nellie with her to her new home, as her own maid; for she declared that she should very much prefer having somebody to wait upon her whose presence would be a constant reminder of the dear old times at Norbury. With this arrangement Nellie herself was entirely content. Her father and mother agreed that they should miss that sight of her bonnie face which they could now get on Sundays, and sometimes on a week day; but if she must go away at all, they were glad for her to go with "Miss Margaret." After all, her new home would not be too far off to prevent her father from walking over there to see her on a Saturday afternoon; even as he used to walk to Dinglewood so many years ago.

Every shade of sadness may now be said to have left Mrs. Lambert's face for good. Her long-lost son returned home at last. Dan Lambert came back one day, having, like the prodigal son, wasted his all in riotous living,—a poor broken-down young man.

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So his mother got her long-wished-for opportunity of "making it up" to him. This she did with such tender love and patience as only mothers can show. Her prayers, faith, and perseverance won him, by God's mercy, to the right way at last. Sometimes she asks him, smilingly, when he intends to marry and settle down, like the rest of her children; but he makes answer, that he has never seen any woman half so good as his mother, or a home equal to hers.

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